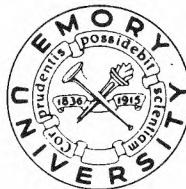


THE SEA AND THE MOOR

MARINA BY
ROSA MACKENZIE KETTLE



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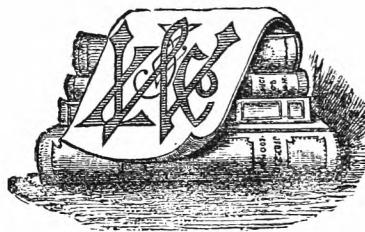
BY

ROSA MACKENZIE KETTLE,

AUTHOR OF

“SMUGGLERS AND FORESTERS,” “THE WRECKERS,” “LA BELLE MARIE,” “OVER THE FURZE,” “THE MISTRESS OF LANGDALE HALL,” ETC., ETC., ETC.

“Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea.”



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P A R T T H E F I R S T.

SUNSET IN THE MOOR.

“To veer, how vain ! On, onward strain,
Brave barks ! In light, in darkness too ;
Through winds and tides one compass guides—
To that, and your own selves, be true.

“But oh, blithe breeze ! and oh, great seas !
Though ne'er, that earliest parting past,
On your wide plain they join again,
Together lead them home at last.

“One port, methought, alike they sought,
One purpose held, where'er they fare—
Oh bounding breeze ! oh rushing seas !
At last, at last, unite them there.”

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.



HOMeward-BOUNd.

CHAPTER I.

"Hark, how the mighty winds on high
 Suddenly lift their wailing cry !
From ocean's waves that blast is borne,
 From grove and wood the leaves are torn ;
Through the long watches of the night,
 Red lightnings flash unquiet light."

R. M. K.

In the cold dawn of that January morning, when the telegraph wires were coiled round posts and chimneys or lay cumbering the iron roads through England, where communication was partially suspended, a great passenger steam-ship, homeward-bound from the East Indies, foundered in mid-ocean.

Such a storm had not been known within the memory of man. Even in sheltered English coombs

and parks the lordliest trees fell. Tall firs, which had done battle with the breezes for centuries, gave way under the combined pressure of the overwhelming weight of snow upon their branches, and the violence of the gale. Ilex and juniper snapped like twigs; cedar and cypress were laid low. In Torbay scores of vessels were driven to and fro and dashed to pieces; while, in the Thames and other large estuaries, the barges and river-craft sank with the white, cold burden, which irresistibly weighed them down.

On the deck of the "Lord Clyde," as she lay helpless, at the mercy of the winds and waves, after the mighty mountain of water descending through the hatch of the engine-room had put out the fires and stopped the throbbing pulses of the machinery, and the thundering waves had stove in her stern-ports and flooded the hold and the cabins—with the boards on which he stood slowly but perceptibly lowering, a man, with his arms folded across his chest, was looking straight before him out to sea. Through a rift in the storm-clouds stole one pale gleam of morning light, but his face was seen more plainly by the fitful rays of a lantern, which flashed up occasionally as one or two seamen hurriedly passed him. They were casting off the ropes

of a large ship's boat, the starboard pinnace, the first which had been launched successfully. It needed to be a bold man to take the perilous leap from the deck of the sinking ship to the boat which was dashing against her broadside in the boiling caldron of waters.

And yet one of the figures, dimly seen through mist and spray, with which it was filled, was that of a woman; a lady by her dress, and of calm mien and bearing. Her eyes were fixed upon the man who was looking down from the ship's side without an effort to save himself. In fact the boat was already full, and he had struggled hard to obtain a place for her. She was still expecting him to join her with one other fellow-passenger, whom he had offered to seek and, if possible, to save, as a pretence for quitting her; but he did not stir. One deep throb heaved the red Garibaldi which covered his broad chest, as he bent a little forward and raised his cap solemnly, reverentially, in token of leave-taking. Then, as the boat was lifted on the waves which threatened to engulf her, he joined in the hoarse cheer of the men who stood gazing from the deck, with but little hope that there was a chance of life for those to whom they bade "God speed you!"

Through the raging of the storm, across the roaring

billows, there came a wailing cry of bitter disappointment, and the man's cheek flushed. He watched the struggles of the boat, as she writhed like a tortured living thing, in the waters; now apparently swallowed up, as wave after wave swept over her, but still emerging and receding slowly, growing less and less, till the darkness and driving mist hid her from his sight.

Though outwardly calm, the man who was left behind in the sinking vessel had bitter thoughts stirring in his heart. Not blame but envy predominated. It seemed as if it would have been so much easier to part with life—that life which beat high and strong within him—in the midst of the mighty exertions, the hideous privations, which the boat's crew must endure, than to wait for death, in the prime of early manhood, with his own bodily strength and mental powers of as little avail as the ponderous machinery of the water-logged vessel. But he had to endure his fate and he bore it manfully.

He was only a steerage passenger; but there were signs of gentle birth in his voice and on his person, and he had enjoyed the passage. Life which had sometimes tried him sorely, had worn of late a pleasanter aspect. That last faint cry of desolation, ringing across the waters, brought back recollections of

loiterings on calm days in conversation; and questionings on subjects which his varied knowledge, picked up in many scenes and climes, enabled him to answer well. But it was of no use now—the most scientific mariner, the best scholar, the cleverest mechanic, could do nothing to avert the common doom. He was denied even the poor consolation of aiding the lovely woman, who had clung to him for help in her wild despairing agony, to bear the horrors of her almost inevitable destiny.

At that moment, when an unaccountable moisture dimmed eyes long unused to tears, a hand was laid suddenly on the man's arm, the touch of tiny trembling fingers made his pulses vibrate. He looked up quickly; and saw, close beside him, hanging over the vessel's side, looking out to sea, a fair, fragile girl, loosely wrapped in a white-frilled dressing-gown, with pale golden hair flowing over her shoulders. So light, so frail, that it almost seemed as if the snow-drifts, the foam-wreaths in which all were about to perish, had conjured up a mocking semblance of humanity.

The man whom that soft, quivering touch had roused from a reverie in which he was bidding adieu to life, looked with compassion at the feeble creature who was about to perish with him. It did not

seem as if she had much vitality to relinquish; and yet, in a certain way, she was beautiful. There were the same perfect lines of form and features, which, under warmer colouring, he had greatly admired; but the delicate pearly skin showed the blue veins meandering beneath it, the small hand resting on his arm might belong to a fairy. He could see the pulse throbbing on the temple, whence the fair abundant hair had been pushed back, or blown away by the rough wind, not in sport, but anger. The wonderfully-beautiful large grey eyes were following with their tearful glances the track of the boat upon the water.

There was something unearthly in the thrilling whisper which sounded plainly in his ear, even amidst the din of the tempest. The man scarcely knew what words she used; but he had already guessed that one person on board the pinnace was very dear to her. They stood for several moments afterwards silently together, looking seaward.

Come new feeling stirred within the man's mind. The only woman in whom, previously, beyond the common claim of suffering feminine humanity, he had felt interested, had profited by the faint chance of life he had obtained for her; and, this done, he was content to share the fate of the captain, the

ship's officers, and the remainder of the crew and passengers. Now, as the fair pale girl stood patiently beside him, he resolved to make one more effort to save her.

It needed but few words to nerve hearts as manly as his own to make another struggle, when he pointed out that, for the moment, there was a slight break in the storm. The winds and waves were mercifully subsiding.

The girl had crouched down shivering where he had left her, with her long tresses blown back by the gale, when he returned bringing a seaman's cap that lay ownerless, and a warm cloak belonging to the captain.

"Dare you venture? Will you follow your sister's brave example? There is a chance of life left for us if you will trust entirely to me," the man said, bending down to speak. "Who knows but we may see again those we love best on earth. The captain and most of the officers elect to stay by the ship; but there is still a boat to be launched, and he has ordered an officer and crew to man the port-cutter. Will you come with me?"

A thrill like that which heralds returning life after long insensibility ran through the girl's frame. A faint blush stole over her cheeks, the grey eyes

kindled lustrosely, the sweet expressive curve of the mouth relaxed, as she laid her hand frankly in that of her new friend, saying faintly, yet firmly: "I am ready."

The man turned away again; and for the next half hour a band of resolute fellows and himself were busy with preparations for launching the port-cutter. One of the officers of the ship, a mere lad, had just consigned to the waves a bottle, carefully corked, containing a last farewell to his friends in England. The youth looked up and said, encouragingly:

"Will you not send a message to say you have left the ship? I will write down the words for you."

The steerage-passenger hesitated; then, with warm thanks for the offer, he dictated a short letter, which ran as follows:

"On Board the Passenger Steam-ship, 'Lord Clyde.'

"January —, 1865. Nine o'clock, a.m.

"The ship is sinking fast. In the hope of saving the life of Lady Desborough, I have persuaded the men to launch the port-cutter, in which we are about to put to sea. Miss Forester quitted the ship an hour ago in the starboard-pinnace. Any one who picks up this letter is requested to forward it to Desborough House, Newmarket.

"GEORGE CAMPION."

"Nothing to your own friends? Is that all?" inquired the young officer.

"I have no friends!" was the curt reply.

As he said the words Campion looked across the heaving waters; while a pang of self-reproach shot through his heart, and a lurid light rushed past his eyes, dimming them by its blinding lustre. The mountainous crested billows took the forms of stony castles on the waste, in the blood-red radiance of a sunset among the Cornish moors.

The girl had fallen quite prostrate on the deck when he again went back to her. It seemed impossible that so frail a thing should survive the tempest, but she smiled gratefully at his approach. The sailors murmured among themselves that it was scarcely fair to take her in the place of a man, who could lend aid and weather the storm. The poor young lady was half dead already. On this point, however, Campion was immovable; and, with the chivalrous good-nature of their class, the crew yielded to his persuasions.

There was scant time for ceremony. With the slight form—well-nigh insensible after the first glance at the hell of waters into which they seemed about to plunge—clasped close to his breast, Campion took the leap which made even the boldest shudder. Then,

laying his burden down gently, and covering the girl's slender figure with a cloak, he lent himself, mind and body, heart and soul, to the task before him. Deep down, almost in the mermaid's caves, with awful glimpses into the abyss, then riding on the crests of mountain waves, the boat still lived and made way slowly. Slowly, indeed; for, before her crew had pulled beyond the range of vision, the ship went down—one wild wailing cry rising above the roaring of the winds and waves.





CHAPTER II.

"She sailed away, for ever and aye,
No message drifts to shore,
And the sea, like Death, it never saith
Why the ship comes home no more !

"But among the throng that waits along
The quay, when ships come home,
Is many a face, whose far-off gaze
Turns seaward over the foam."

"*SUNSET IN THE MOOR!* Yes, that's the Admiral's address—he's sure to be here punctual. The train is in a few minutes before its time," said the railway porter, addressing a lady who had been set down at a small station on the Devon and Cornwall line; as he deposited two modest-looking packages on one side of the platform and hastened away to attend to other passengers.

The young lady to whom the boxes appertained sat down on a bench within sight of her luggage. She looked extremely pale and delicate, and, in spite of

her very fair complexion, there was something foreign in her air and accent as she exchanged a few words with the railway official, and then remained patiently waiting for the carriage which was to be sent, she said, to meet her.

Precisely at the moment announced in "Bradshaw" as that for the arrival of the afternoon train, a carriage drove up to the station-gate. A man-servant claimed the luggage, and touched his hat respectfully to the lady; who, after giving up her ticket, had scarcely a minute to wait in the quiet country road before the boxes were neatly disposed of under a tarpaulin, and the door closed upon her of the well-appointed britschka.

The young lady leant back and threw up her veil after the horses moved on. Very pale, very sad, very young she looked; with the shadows of apprehension and loneliness gathering round her as she approached her new and unknown home. She had very little clue to the character of its inmates, and her position must be dependent and might be painful. Let us read over her shoulder, before the twilight deepens, one of the many singular advertisements extracted from the columns of *The Times*, which had attracted her attention and led to her present engagement.

"WANTED.—In a remote part of England, a Lady competent to undertake the management of the establishment of an elderly widower, and to educate his only daughter. She must sing well, and understand thoroughly the science of music. She must also be a good performer on the organ. Knowledge of the Italian language a principal consideration. Christian principles indispensable. Form of worship, immaterial. No references given or required."

A translation into somewhat cramped Italian of this notification of her future employer's requisitions followed; and the address, to initials, at a small post-town in Cornwall.

Perhaps the chief attraction, in the first instance, to the friendless lady had been the appearance of mystery, which, under other circumstances, might have been distasteful. At all events it had not deterred her from making the few inquiries which had resulted in her receiving a cheque for the expenses of her long journey, and half a year's salary in advance.

It was quite early in the spring, but the season was an advanced one in the south of England. The banks were starred with primroses, and on the wide commons, which in that district are called moors, the

furze was all aglow. Leaving the shelter of the hedgerows, the road struck off across the waste, where piles of stone were fantastically backed by glorious sunset-clouds. Very dark purple streaks alternated with golden hues and breaks of burning crimson; while dark ridges of the, at present, unflowering heath undulated all around. Towers and pinnacles of castellated structures seemed to vary the otherwise desolate landscape, magnified by the low, slanting rays and wavering lights and shadows. These fairy edifices, in the morning, resolved themselves into the rude stony outlines of the Cornish Tors.

Eyes accustomed to English landscapes would not, probably, have been so easily deceived; but the Eastern palaces in fairy tales, the edifices raised by the Genii of the Lamp and the Ring, the enchanted gardens of Armida, were more familiar than those rugged wastes to the vivid imagination of the young woman reclining silently in the open carriage. Suffice it that the view gave her pleasure, raising images which, for the moment, banished fatigue and disquiet; and she longed to know which of the grand castles on the rocky mounds was to be her future abode.

It was rather disappointing when the road sud-

denly turned away from the gorgeous sunset and the sharp acclivities, and dipped down into a dark basin of woodland. Blood-red crimson glowed on the trunks of the grand old beech trees, and shot up through the, as yet, leafless branches which formed overhead an impervious canopy. Moss lay thick at the roots of the enormous boles, and lichen and mistletoe hung and clustered from and on the mighty monsters, which had stood the rains and storms of centuries with less injury than had been done to them on one night of the previous winter. More than a hundred trees had been prostrated in Admiral Champernowne's grounds during the great snow-storm in January.

This piece of information, which was imparted to the lady by the servant who had received the luggage, while the coachman drove slowly through the lodge-gates, did not elicit an answer. A slight quiver of the lip and eyelid showed that the remark awakened some painful associations. The foreign lady shivered, and drew her shawl closer, perhaps at the thought of the inclement winters she must pass far from the sunny South. Both veil and dress were indicative of deep and recent mourning, and her health, judging from her fragile appearance, was likely to be very delicate.

The long avenue through the beech and oak wood wound up the steep side of a hill. Glimapses of the red sunset were here and there visible through the trees, as the road rose higher and higher ; until, once more, the glorious prospect westward, as far as the sea, grew visible; crossed by yet darker and brighter lines, more vividly contrasted. On the summit of the hill, with the full glory of the sunset on the moor stretching away for miles in front of the windows, stood a large mansion, of a faint pinkish hue, now flooded over with red light. A long colonnade of the rough granite of the district extended the whole length of the façade ; the sun-rays sparkling on the windows and glittering in sparks on the rough pillars, and on the pebbled walks which intersected a garden full of spring flowers on one side of the house. Stiff beds and borders of crocuses, hepaticas, dwarf-jonquils and anemones, all crimsoned over by the slanting beams, were edged with stones from the moor, which glimmered and glinted in the warm light ; while, behind the large country house, deep masses of foliage closed in. All the brilliancy and loveliness of the prospect lay westward ; dark night and coming gloom brooding in the east, as the sunbeams entered reluctantly and were immediately absorbed in the shadowy woodland.

The straight rows of windows facing the moor and the sunset were mostly open; and, as the carriage stopped and the footman got down to open the low iron gates which shut in the house and flower garden, a faint strain of music stole on the ear. The foreign lady listened attentively to the uncertain notes of the organ, feebly touched, and the tones of a girl's voice, singing, in Latin, a Vesper hymn. Though the utterances were indistinct, they seemed to harmonise with the dying day, and the slight hopes of welcome entertained by the stranger. Over the moor the red sunset was retreating—light after light died off from the panes of the long lines of windows, flower after flower resumed its natural hue—as the brooding shadow crept steadily along the front of the old house, which a caprice of its eccentric owner caused to be known far and near under the name of “Sunset in the Moor.”

A very large and lofty room—evidently newly built, still partially lit up by the red sunbeams which sparkled on the gilt railings of an organ gallery at the farther end—was revealed when the quiet well-trained servant waiting in the hall ushered in the traveller. No one was visible, but the low notes of the organ, imperfectly as it was played, filled the apartment. A curtain drawn across hid the musi-

cian ; and the domestic had to cross the whole length of the long room and ascend a short staircase at the farther end, shut off by a closed door, to give notice of the arrival of the new inmate of the Admiral's mansion.

The young foreign lady's glance, sadly, yet with a kind of mournful satisfaction, travelled slowly round. The glowing tints pleased her southern taste, probably bringing back recollections of palaces in the fair cities of Italy. The walls were painted in compartments of white and gold, and dusky rose or Roman red ; the ceiling, curiously moulded, was tinted with soft grey, relieved by gilding; flattened columns with burnished brackets broke the long lines of the room. A classical pattern was wrought in the velvet pile of the carpet ; and, in far corners unpenetrated by the sunbeams, one or two marble statues stood in shadow. A few priceless pictures, and works of art in bronze and Florentine mosaic, were ranged around. On every table lay handsome books in ornamented covers, shut and open, giving the room a pleasant appearance of constant occupation. An enormous wood-fire glowed on the hearth, near which two delicate Italian greyhounds lay basking in the heat.

Suddenly the music stopped, almost before the Signora had finished her inspection ; and presently

the servant returned through the door below the organ gallery, bringing word that Miss Champernowne would be down directly; but for several minutes there was perfect silence. The timid stranger was becoming very nervous, and began to regard the delay as slightly uncourteous; when the door behind her from the hall opened quickly, and Admiral Champernowne entered the music-room.

He was a tall man, much above the average height, and looking yet more stately from his thin and very erect figure. Not quite so elderly as might have been expected from the advertisement, but yet with hair silvered by time and blown about by the fresh air. He carried his head high, and with a certain gesture which gave an appearance of haughtiness; turning his face slightly away when speaking, especially if addressing strangers. And yet, the glance shot from beneath those shaggy grey eyebrows was not indirect nor unkindly, and his voice was courteous and pleasant.

Undoubtedly it must have sounded all the more so to the Italian lady, from his addressing her in her native language. The moment the Signora entered the Italianised English mansion, the accents of her own country greeted her. Perhaps this reception

kindly as it was meant to be, took her by surprise; and she coloured, as an English girl might have done in replying to her master; but there was little to blush for in the liquid tones and pure accent—as the old Admiral, in his old-fashioned gallantry, described it—“Lingua Toscana in bocca Romana.”

Perhaps the Admiral had expected to see a dark-browed magnificent Roman lady, for he lowered his lofty glance with some difficulty to the slight low figure and fair face of his blushing visitor. But, since Petrarch’s time, there have been many Lauras as fair as his beloved one, with her *chiome d’oro*, extolled enthusiastically in *terza* and *ottava rima*; or living in beauty, on the Rialto and by the Arno, as well as on the canvas in Italian studios and galleries.

A fluttering of draperies, a hurried footstep, and then the door at the farther end of the long room opened and shut again. “La poverina,” the Admiral said, was undoubtedly afraid to come in alone. He must go and fetch her.

Again the stranger was left in solitude. The red sun-reflections faded entirely from the walls, the logs sank on the hearth and glowed dimly; the large room grew dreamily indistinct, with its fair lines of white, and red, and gold, mingling together and receding harmoniously.

At last the door reopened ; the dogs lifted their heads, jingling softly the silver bells of their collars. One last straggling ray shone level from the horizon into the room, glinting in the large glass opposite the window, after lighting up the dark face, shyly uplifted, of Juliet Champernowne. There was the same haughty gesture, the small head slightly averted, the same piercing glance rapidly withdrawn, the same melodious southern accent; only the Admiral's daughter's slight girlish form reached no higher than his shoulder, though she was tall for a woman ; and the slender fingers clasping his arm trembled with excitement, as the young country-bred maiden came forward to meet her future instructress and companion.

Much more Italian in appearance than the daughter of a Florentine lady standing by the hearth, dark as night, with jet black hair, and large liquid eyes surrounded by dark streaks and overshadowed by dusky brows and veiling lashes of the deepest hue, Juliet Champernowne glided through the shadowy saloon, with a graceful movement inherited from her Neapolitan mother which redeemed her from the vice of awkwardness. She was so painfully embarrassed that the words died in whispers on her lips ; and her hand clung to her father's arm, even when he tried to

release himself that she might welcome her visitor. Nothing is more infectious than shyness ; and there were no subjects in common between the three persons who stood contemplating each other in constrained silence in the twilight, after the first greetings had been exchanged.

The Admiral broke the pause, hurriedly bidding his daughter take "La Signora Bianchi—no, no," he said with a half smile, looking kindly at the delicate girl, "La Signorina," to her apartment. He then rang the bell and ordered dinner to be on the table in half an hour ; if that time, he added, would be sufficient for her toilette. All in that house *now*, he said emphatically, were as punctual as clockwork.

A shadow passed over the girl's face, and her eyes sparkled with passionate lustre ; but she did not speak, as she somewhat sullenly obeyed her father. The Signorina, as she was always afterwards called in the Admiral's house, formed her own conclusions ; which, though hasty, were right ones.

Something, or some one, had gone forth, or been taken away from that orderly household which, or who, had sinned against its stiff decorum. That thing or person was tenderly regretted by Juliet, and had been harshly treated by the veteran. La Signorina assumed her black evening dress hastily, before the

oval mirror in the old-fashioned bedroom to which she had been conducted ; instinctively taking warning not to sin against the rules laid down by her host.





CHAPTER III.

"And when winds awake my heart will quake,
As though the good ship could feel
The angry waves lash her groaning staves,
And tear at her straining keel."

ONE stringent article in Admiral Champernowne's code was early rising; and Juliet's southern indolence of temperament rebelled systematically against it. To the lazy girl it seemed simply incomprehensible that, winter and summer, she must descend at the sound of that dreaded bell, to preside at a breakfast-table where she seldom touched a morsel; and that any good effect could result from such mortification of the flesh.

Then again, to linger late in the twilight, watching the red sunset flooding the moor, till the golden moon rose above the woodland, might be pleasant; but to take a brisk constitutional walk at intervals in her studies, measured by the infallible chronometer in

the hall, and to be strictly questioned as to its extent, was a positive penance.

Another trial was the constantly recurring injunction as to the direction of these monotonous promenades. Before noon, the Admiral's daughter and her governess were to walk on the side of the hill which lay open to the morning sunshine. Later in the day, the old officer was on the watch to open the gate into the avenue beneath the beech trees. Reason and taste might have prompted the same decision had she been free to choose; but, day after day, Juliet turned away from the light and brightness, and strove to follow the bias of her own inclination—to the full as self-willed as her parent. It would have been a real gratification for once to turn her back upon the glowing west, though she was a child of the sunny South, and plunge into the shadowy woodland at eventide—but this was never permitted.

La Signorina, to whom the whole country was new, always preferred the sunny side of the hill; and strove to reconcile the wilful girl to her fate. "It will come upon you in time. At first it is not so bad—you will hate everything, as I do, soon," her pupil would murmur; as, with the Admiral politely bowing them out, they passed through the appointed gate at the usual inevitable hour, and saw the sun

gleam on the face of his watch, as he held it up and compared it with the one he had given to his daughter, that they might not exceed the allotted time.

“What can be the use of such savage punctuality?” the girl exclaimed passionately one morning, when they were out of hearing but not out of sight. “I wonder what would happen if we were half an hour late!”

She set her face resolutely forward, in spite of her father’s constant parting injunction not to walk fast up hill, and especially not to speak during the ascent. The climax she announced was, however, one which she had not yet ventured to bring about.

The Italian lady only smiled. “Why make hard what is so small a matter? Is it not better, my child, to walk in sunshine than in shadow? The green lanes are so pleasant in the morning.”

“Not to me,” said the girl sullenly; “I want to feed my doves, to run down the hill with old Nero, to pick up beech-nuts and acorns in the long avenue. I envy the little Spanish pigs feeding in the shady hollow. I hate these long walks!”

“They are, nevertheless, good for you,” said the elder woman, who secretly was beginning to suffer a little from constraint. “At all events, of what use to rebel? Let us enjoy ourselves as much as we can.”

A bird singing on a bough underneath which they were passing caroled merrily, as if to confirm the moral; the tiny waves of the little brook rushed cheerily along. Juliet's brow unbent a little, and she pressed fondly the arm tenderly cast round her.

"I do not mind so much now that you are come," she said affectionately, "and, as yet, less tired of it all than I am: now that I am not quite alone." She sighed deeply.

"Have you had other companions?" her friend said kindly. "Never mind. If it pains you, do not answer the question."

The young girl did not speak. She ran on, followed by the little greyhounds; their silver bells jingling. At a turn in the lane she stopped short.

"Come on fast, Signorina," she said; "I want to show you a new prospect; we shall just have time."

The Signorina quickened her steps and joined her. Instead of taking their usual round, which occupied exactly an hour, Juliet hurried down a mossy, shadowy lane intersected by the brook, which, in wet weather, must have rendered it almost impassable; but only now gleamed in a few wet patches where it overflowed the gravel, running its course deep and still under the high thorn-hedge.

"Shall we not be late?" said the foreigner. "These

lanes are so turning, I cannot always see my way
Giulietta, I should not like to displease your father."

"Indeed it is not agreeable!" said the girl, frowning.
"No, no, I will not deceive you. I should not
like to make him angry, and, perhaps, lose my only
friend. Do not fear, Signorina, I know a path which
will take us home in time."

Thus relieved, and young enough to be intensely pleased with any variety, the governess walked quickly on by the brook-side. Colourless primroses, growing pale in shadow, peeped out among the opening fronds of the ferns and cool green leaves on the bank. The black spikes of the thorns were gemmed with white flowers, like snow-flakes, hanging loosely on the boughs. It was quite early in the spring, but in the sheltered lanes the air, perfumed by violets, was soft and warm.

Juliet hurried along without stopping to look for them. "We must not stop to gather flowers," she said. "If I come this way in the morning there is not a moment to spare, and in the afternoon, when we have more time for walking, we must turn our backs on the green lanes. I wonder whether any one ever detested the sunset as I do?"

"Be patient!" said the foreigner breathlessly,
"oh, how pretty it is here! See, Giulietta!—fanciulla

mia ! Do not remind me of what is painful in the face of this beautiful nature."

The young, enthusiastic woman, with her whole soul in her eyes, leant over the low hedge which divided the lane from a large sunny meadow, in which two or three old horses were grazing. The brook kept up its merry song under the bank, freshening the grass, whilst on its margin grew abundantly, large king-cups and watercresses and broad-leaved flags, bending over the stream. On the other side of the wide, sloping field, facing the morning sunshine, with a few wide-spreading oak-trees scattered about, and an orchard white with pear and damson blossoms, but not yet blushing with the rosy bloom of the apples, coming down to the narrow road, stood a solitary dwelling-house. It was not in the cottage style, neither was it one of the rambling, picturesque farmhouses of the district, but a well-built gentleman's residence on a moderate scale, lying snugly in its own fields and garden ; with capital offices and stables at the back, and a grove of fir-trees keeping off the stormy westerly gales. From that white-walled house there was not a chance of seeing the gorgeous sunsets over the moor, of which Juliet was so weary.

"That was poor Uncle Richard's house ! Those

were his favourite horses," said Miss Champernowne in a soft, low tone. "Signorina," she added hurriedly, "we must not stop a moment longer. We shall only just be back in time."

Juliet caught hold of her friend's hand, and, drawing it through her arm, pulled her away. The two girls ran laughing down the lane together; though, when she first turned from looking at the white house in the orchard, the eyes of the Admiral's daughter were full of tears. But hers were April moods, quickly passing; by-and-by her southern temperament might be of an intenser cast, but, as yet, Giulietta was hardly past her childhood.

Scarcely a word was interchanged between the governess and her pupil as they hurried home. Admiral Champernowne, with his watch in his hand, opened the shrubbery-gate; but he did not chide, for the minute-hand had not passed the appointed figure.

"Just in time," he said courteously to the Signorina. "I am delighted to see that, like myself, you appreciate the virtue of punctuality."

One evening, a month later in the spring, there was a red, lowering sunset. The storm-clouds were packed closely on the horizon, and the wind moaned drearily through the beech-wood. Juliet had her own way for once; there was no long walk, and the

usual period of exercise was passed in pacing up and down the avenue, within easy reach of the house. The Admiral's tall form was visible at regular intervals between the pillars of the colonnade, as he took his usual quarter-deck walk; but he did not interfere with his daughter and her foreign governess.

Juliet was pleased with the slight change. She was grave, but not inclined to be discontented, and the young Italian lady always encouraged and fostered these better moods. As they walked slowly up and down under the trees they were talking of The White House, as it was called, in the orchard, occupied till within the last four months by Admiral Champernowne's only brother. "Uncle Richard," Juliet said, with a sigh, "died in January, on the night of the great snowstorm."

The Signorina's countenance changed. "That is a memorable epoch, my child," she said mournfully; "many a poor soul rendered itself up to God in that tempest! By land and sea death and destruction made havoc. Let us speak of other things."

"No," said the girl; "I like to speak of it. I like to think of what is grand and terrible. All night I sat up, watching the snow drift over the moor; till it lay in heaps, almost filling up the intervals between the pillars, just there where papa is walking up and

down. A little bird almost beat itself to death against my window-pane. When I took it in the poor, small creature was quite tamed by terror. There was a dreadful shipwreck that night," she added dreamily. "Sometimes I have fancied, since, that bird brought me a message. I wished I had looked under its wings before I let it go in the morning."

The Signorina grasped her arm. "Hush!" she said. "One whom I loved dearly perished in that shipwreck!"

"That is very strange," said Juliet; "I was sure there was some tie between us. But let us go a little farther off. Papa is looking at us."

The Signorina complied; and, though her limbs trembled, she walked to the end of the darkening avenue. "Tell me more," she said, wishing to change the subject, "of the occupant of The White House. To whom did he bequeath it? That would be, to one tired and weary, a most pleasant heritage."

Juliet's countenance darkened. "It is very doubtful," she said, "whether the present owner of The White House will ever claim it. My uncle Richard lived alone. There was a time when we were allowed to go and see him, and we loved the place very much. He was not like my father. Nothing

was done by rule. People ate when they were hungry, and walked as far as, and whenever, they liked, or sat down in the meadow if they were tired. But that was long ago. His ways did not suit my father; and, when we ceased to be children, we were not allowed to go to The White House. But my uncle loved us dearly all the same."

She stopped abruptly. "I should like to tell you all about my uncle Richard," she said, with an effort: "only it will bring up other names, thoughts that I dare hardly trust myself to dwell upon; but I will try. You would never believe, Signorina, what a hard cruel man my father is when really angry. There was a twinkle in his eye this morning, when we were a little late in coming back from our walk, that frightened me. I have not seen it before since you came to live with us. We were only just in time."

"Patience, my child," said the Italian, stooping to kiss her. "Do not tell me of faults in one whom you are bound to respect. I am sorry you so often set yourself against his wishes."

"I know it is of no use," said the girl; "he broke a harder will than mine. But let me tell you, Signorina: it will do me good. My uncle Richard left the pretty little house in the orchard, and the pleasant fields, and plenty of money, to my brother—the only

one I ever had; I might be living there with him now, but he will never return to England. Was it likely that a fine manly fellow would be tied and bound by regulations which a girl finds it hard to bear? fettered hand and foot; expected to walk and ride, hunt and shoot by clockwork; never allowed to stray beyond his tether, and such a short one? Of course, it did not answer. Gerald ran away from home twenty times before he was of age; but then he had such a good heart that he came back to look after his poor little sister. He braved, what I can tell you is no trifle, my father's displeasure, and made submission; for he had a heart as soft as a woman's, and he knew that he owed duty to his parent. My uncle Richard often interceded and made peace between them; till, at last, he and my father quarrelled, and then there was no one to say a kind word for the culprit. When Gerald came of age, he took a little property which was his own, and bid me good-bye, and went beyond seas. He told me that he should never come home, unless it was when we were both grown old and he was master. He could not live here as a slave. I have never forgiven my father for parting us. For a little while I heard from Gerald regularly; but when my father found it out he stopped the letters, and forbade my writing to my brother, and now I have

not the least idea where to address him. I do not even know whether he is living or dead, though my father declares he is sure to come back; and when my uncle Richard left him a fortune it was impossible to trace him. The only comfort I have is, that no certain tidings of his death have reached England."

Juliet walked on with the tears rolling down her cheeks; but, even in this moment of sorrow, she studied not to allow her attitude to betray, to a person watching her from a distance, her abandonment to grief. The Signorina tenderly strove to soothe her. They were still walking up and down under the beeches, when the storm which had been gathering burst upon them. Heavy rain-drops pattered down through the branches, the wind rose higher, and the black volumes of cloud swept up overhead from the moor, where they had been ominously couched.

The Admiral's loud tones were heard calling his daughter within doors, and the aspect of the sky was full of menacing fury. The double windows were closed, and all made snug; "the hatches battened down," as the Admiral phrased it, "in readiness for a stormy night."

The wind rushed wildly across the moor, and the rain dashed against the glass, proving the wisdom of

the old officer's manifold precautions. In the morning, one of the Admiral's servants, who was abroad early, picked up on the beach a bottle which had been washed ashore from some wrecked vessel.

Juliet looked with interest at the green glass, encrusted with sea shells and weed, which had been intended to bear to some loving heart a message from the vasty deep ; but the name on the scroll was quite unknown to her. The Signorina perused the document in silence still more anxiously.

"Send it on," said the Admiral, in a softer tone than usual. "Some poor wounded heart will perhaps take comfort, though I fear there is little hope that the poor lady is still living. Not you, child," he added compassionately, seeing that his daughter was weeping ; "the Signorina will be kind enough to direct it for us, since my hand is crippled with the gout. Let there be no delay in forwarding this missive to its destination."

The old officer, really touched by a calamity which had deeply affected the whole nation, gave the scroll to the Italian lady, whose beautiful handwriting always attracted his admiration. He noticed when he studied the direction, as was his frequent practice before locking up the post-bag, that the fine Italian characters were a trifle unsteady on the envelope in-

scribed with the address, which George Campion had dictated to the poor lad whose last mortal work had been this office of charity for his fellow-passengers on board the East-Indiaman.



PART THE SECOND.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE SEA.

“ Say not, ‘The struggle nought availeth,
 The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
 And as things have been, they remain.’

“ If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars ;
 It may be, in yon smoke concealed
Your comrades chased e'en now the fliers,
 And, but for you, possess the field.

“ For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
 Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
 Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

“ And not by eastern windows only,
 When daylight comes, comes in the light ;
In front the sun climbs slow—how slowly !
 But westward, look, the land is bright.”

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH.



CHAPTER IV

"Give back my golden ringlets,"
Said the Palm-tree to the Nile;
But the stream swept by in silence
With its dimple and its smile.

"By pyramid and palace,
With its never-ending smile,
By tomb and mosque, and mazar,
It flowed, that mighty Nile!"

"Come, give me back my blossoms,"
Sighed the Palm-tree to the Nile;
But the river flowed unheeding,
With its soft and silver smile."

HORATIUS BONAR.

AT the entrance of the town of Newmarket, just on the verge of the heath, stands a large mansion, in extensive grounds, surrounded by high walls and park palings, overhung by trees. Very green is the soft turf under their shadow; and, all through the spring months, the nightingales keep up a perpetual

melody. Why is it that the nightingales sing better in the Eastern Counties than in any other part of England ?

More than once, a lady in deep mourning, as she moved along under the high wall, strove to gain a glimpse into the shrubbery ; but her efforts were unsuccessful. After taking two or three turns along the broad, dusty highway, and casting several reconnoitring glances round, which seemed to betoken that, although she appeared to take an interest in it, the place was unfamiliar to her, she turned through iron gates, which stood open, into a winding, narrower, gravelled road, leading to the back of the mansion, past one of the large training yards and stables.

A string of race-horses was just issuing forth, and the grooms in charge looked sharply at the stranger, who, in her turn, closely scanned the clean-limbed, fleet-looking steeds ; as beautiful a sight as the eye can well take in. Perhaps the jockeys thought the lady as thoroughbred-looking as their charges, for they touched their caps ; and the salutation was courteously returned, as if by one accustomed to marks of deference.

Though her dress was black and very simple, the amply flowing skirt, neatly fastened up over a quilted silk petticoat, showed delicate feet and slender ankles ;

and she moved with the gliding grace of a Spanish woman. The black plumed hat was pulled low down over a pale but beautiful face, still more shrouded by a *crépe* veil, and an abundance of dark brown hair, very tastefully arranged. The tall figure was but little revealed by the clinging folds of a large *bournous*.

Up and down at the back of the large mansion, as she had done in front of the high wall, the lady walked for more than an hour; looking sadly at intervals through the palings, which did not form quite as impervious a screen. There was nothing to be seen, however, excepting the rather neglected environs of a house whose owners had long been absent. Only dim vistas, through trees, of extensive stables and offices, winding, weedy walks, clustering chimneys, and peaked roofs, grey with age, and mossy with lichens.

After a time, the lady extended her walk under the park palings a little farther, beyond the shrubberies and out upon an undulating expanse of grass, with, here and there, a clump of blossoming may-trees, and ridges of golden furze. She stopped, and put up her veil, when a white gate, at the end of the plantations, opened, and a small party of persons came across the green towards her.

A little carriage, drawn by two milk-white goats

containing a child, and accompanied by two nurses and a lady, came very slowly past the hawthorn-trees and up the hill, to the ridge where the yellow gorse-bushes were in flower. It was but a slight acclivity, such as in that flat district often does duty for an eminence, affording a somewhat wider and more cheerful prospect. The child, the lady, and the servants were all in deep mourning; and there was no talking or merry laughter either when they halted or moved along. It was a most silent, melancholy little procession.

The solitary lady who had been watching the place so long sat down on one of the grassy hillocks on the common, as the party approached; and rearranged her veil. It would have been more natural to have removed it altogether, for the air was balmy, and some kind of oppression at her heart made her pant and struggle for breath; but she drew the thick folds closely round her face.

The first words spoken among the small group, which had issued from the side-gate into the grounds of Desborough House, were uttered when the nurses and the lady in charge of the little boy noticed the black-robed silent figure sitting on the bank. Something in the attitude, suggesting the idea of illness or distress of mind, attracted the attention of the kind-

hearted women ; and the one whose appearance denoted her to be of superior rank to her companions, stepped forward quickly to inquire if she could render any assistance.

The lady seemed embarrassed, and did not answer, till the child's carriage drew closer; and her eyes met the grave wondering gaze of large grey eyes full of intelligent sweetness. The little boy did not speak, but a sudden change passed over his features, and he put out his hand. At this movement, which seemed to surprise his attendants, the strange lady burst into tears.

Though she was quite young, there was something matronly in her appearance, and in the expression of her downcast face, dimly seen through her mourning veil, which made the women whisper to each other, " Poor thing ! she has lost a little one like our young master." They had not the heart to hurry away, leaving the young bereaved mother in that green solitude among the blossoming may-trees.

" Perhaps you would like to come in and rest ?" said the compassionate elderly lady, much struck by the young stranger's refined appearance and aspect of distress. " We do not indeed see any visitors at present. This dear child has recently lost a parent—but you seem ill and weary. Let me offer you my arm. How can we help you ?"

The child still held the lady's hand fast clasped in his small fingers. Now he pulled her down with all his force, and drew her face towards his. No wonder that, with the grey eyes looking pleadingly into her own, the young bereaved woman, who had, as the kind widow's maternal instinct taught her, been a mother, kissed the little boy passionately. Then gathering her veil, which she had put aside for a moment, still more closely together, with a hurried gesture of thanks and leave-taking, which included the whole party, she went quickly and silently away.

This was but the first of many meetings. Day after day—for the habits of the mourning household were very monotonous—the little carriage, with its silent occupant and his attendants, might be seen either in the lane, on the common, or on the short turf of the heath, where innumerable skylarks started up, singing blithely at the approach of footsteps; and, either far off or near at hand, the solitary, darkly-clad lady haunted the small, mournful *cortége*.

Mrs. Vernon, a relative of Sir John Desborough, who during his absence in India took care of his only son, had thought it right to make some inquiry respecting this chance acquaintance; and had heard in the small town, where the lady's appearance had at-

tracted much attention, that she occupied handsome lodgings, where she paid promptly for everything, and kept herself quite secluded. Her only recreation appeared to consist in the daily walk which brought her in contact with the little boy, who was always looking out for her. He would point out her moving figure on the heath to his attendants when it was little more than a speck in the distance.

There was never a word interchanged between them. Neither the lady nor the child had yet spoken to each other, and the notice she took of his companions was limited to a courteous gesture ; yet something in her manner and appearance made them respect her. She was always mentioned among them as a person worthy of consideration, and even of gratitude, if it were only for the spark of animation, the faint flush of pleasure which, at her appearance, coloured the pale cheeks and glimmered in the eyes of the delicate boy.

At the present season Newmarket was completely deserted. The spring-meetings were over ; even the training-stables were mostly empty, and none of the gay frequenters of the little racing-town were occupying their accustomed lodgings. The apartments were let at comparatively low rents to the few persons whom any temporary business or the peculiar

buoyancy of the air might attract to the place. If the lady came from abroad, as was surmised, she might enjoy the brisk air on the heath. It was like a miracle, the inhabitants said, to see the change wrought by it in a few days; and, already, her land-lady declared, Mrs. Chichester was looking the better for it. Such was the name in which the lodgings were taken in Palace Buildings: and the lady's regular payments and distinguished appearance told in her favour, and were all that was known of the solitary being, who was becoming each day more an object of interest to the silent, lonely child, looking out between the horns of his goats to see her draw nearer on the heath.

"What a fancy the little master has taken to her," the nurses said to each other, over and over again, after she had passed; sometimes only exchanging a smile full of meaning with the child, at others stooping down to kiss him. "He never noticed anybody or anything so much before! Surely it must do him good! and, poor young lady! it seems to be a comfort to her to meet us in her walks. Master Hugh is perhaps like the little one she has lost."

Mrs. Chichester's arrival was an event in the dull lives of these women, and of the lonely child over whom they kept watch. Another memorable era

occurred when the lady first entered the gates of Desborough House. The invitation was given and accepted silently. Little Hugh had fast hold of her hand, and pulled his new friend after him, when a sharp shower came on and drove the party under shelter of the trees, just as she was stopping to kiss him at the front entrance.

Mrs. Vernon, a shy, quiet woman, seconded the child's voiceless entreaty; and, for the first time, entered into conversation with the lady. She was quite accustomed to seeing her, and had from the first been much interested in her appearance. No doubt she had passed through some severe trials; and the bereaved widow had had her full share of suffering as a wife and mother, and knew how to pity her.

It was but natural that they should speak about the little boy, who was almost too young to understand what was said in his presence. Younger than his years, though they were limited to six, Mrs. Vernon said, with tears in her eyes, and involuntarily lowering her voice to a whisper; as if fearing that the child's intelligent glance, which was fixed upon her, might indicate more insight into her meaning than his lips could utter.

"It is a great grief to us! It will be a terrible shock to his father, when he finds, from my last

letter—I had not the heart to tell him sooner—that little Hugh has never spoken one word since he came home from India. I am almost afraid he never will speak again ; and yet his Ayah said that he used to chatter away freely enough to his poor mother before he was taken away from her."

The lady, whose silent communications with the child had not acquainted her with his infirmity, was deeply moved. After a few moments she said with some asperity :

"Where is his Ayah ? I noticed that he had no Indian attendant. It is cruel to separate a child of his tender age from all to whom he is accustomed."

"His Ayah would not remain in England. He was not fond of her, and did not speak to her any more than to others," said Mrs. Vernon, somewhat hurt by the sudden question and reproachful tone. "I believe his terrible illness during the long voyage occasioned this misfortune ; which is attributed to weakness, since there appears to be no organic defect. It is not want of affection on the part of those around him, I assure you, which has silenced the little darling."

"No, no," said the lady impatiently; "but he was not born in England. Perhaps his mother, from whom you say he was taken away so young, spoke to him

in the same language as his native nurses. I understand a little of Hindostanee, enough to amuse a child. Let me speak to him?"

She did not wait for permission, but knelt down and caressingly uttered a few short sentences, in a very different tone to that in which she had hitherto spoken, which was clear and decided. Now the soft low words, mere infantine phrases of endearment, quite unintelligible to the listening women, were like the cooing of the ringdove.

The child's large, deep, grey eyes were fixed upon her in wonder. He turned his head slightly, and put up his baby hand to her lips; with a gesture which Mrs. Vernon and his nurses had never seen him use before. The poor young lady was probably reminded of her own lost infant; for the little hand was imprisoned and passionately caressed before she rose from the ground, trembling all over. "Speech will come in time," she said; "do not hurry him. He *hears* my words at all events, that is satisfactory." In spite of the increasing rain she kissed the child silently, and departed.

The large lofty room looking into the gardens of Palace Buildings seemed very silent and lonely to its occupant that evening! The shower had passed off; but the rain-drops glittered on the grass, and hung

like diamond sparks on the red thorns and sweet-briar under her windows. A magnificent copper beech at the end of the straight gravel walk, glowed in the sunset ; and the nightingales sang their very best as if to cheer her, but in vain.

Now that she had laid aside her hat and cloak Mrs. Chichester looked very young and handsome. Full of youthful healthful life, as little as possible resembling a bereaved widow; but very restless and unhappy.

The large pile of buildings, which had once been a great gambler's palace, was now subdivided into private houses and lodgings ; which stood on high ground, with handsome flights of wide stone steps descending into the separate enclosures. One broad terrace had formerly extended the whole length of the building, but it was now partitioned and distributed according to the taste of the several occupants. Mrs. Chichester's drawing-room opened into a very wide verandah ; but her garden was smaller than those belonging to the private houses on either side : containing only a grass plat, with a few beds of flowers and borders of ornamental shrubs, and a straight walk terminating in an arbour overhung by the great copper beech, which had once been one of the principal features of the lawn in front of Crockford's

mansion. Beyond the blooming lilacs, syringas, and laburnums, were small paddocks, where beautiful thoroughbred mares of immense value were grazing with their foals; and, in every bush and tufted clump of the divided shrubberies, the nightingales were trilling forth their cadences, or emitting their clear melodious call.

As the moon rose and the sun declined Mrs. Chichester came out into her garden; and stood, bare-headed, listening. Through the evening air the sharp whistle from the railroad, which intersected that which had once been the park, came shrilly; cutting across the warbling in the thickets and the stillness of approaching night. A train had just come in; and in the neighbouring street there were slight, not inharmonious, sounds heard very faintly. But no one came to cheer the lonely watcher.

Up and down the now silent walks of the moonlit garden, with her hands clasped, almost knotted together, the agitated woman walked; revolving in her mind the question whether aught but death should separate a mother and her child; until there came a change in the notes of the nightingales, a pallor in the moonbeams, and the doubt was still unsatisfied when she went indoors.

Mrs. Vernon watched anxiously, but in vain, for

the reappearance of the lady, and little Hugh looked gravely between the horns of the white goats to as little purpose. Perhaps he was pining to hear a few more words in Hindostanee ; for the child seemed languid and weary, and did not care to go out of the shrubberies when he missed his accustomed gratification. One day, when his nurses had taken him in quite a different direction, through the town and across the heath towards the fir plantation on the Warren Hill, he suddenly stretched out his little hand and pointed to a dark spot on the heath, which gradually grew larger and larger, until his dear lady stood beside him.

Her quick motherly glance immediately detected a change in the child's appearance for the worse ; and when the nurses, in answer to her questions, said that the little master had been pining for her to talk to him, she stooped down and murmured a few soft sentences in his ear.

The child listened delightedly ; and, this time, Mrs. Chichester walked up the street with his tiny hand in hers, parting from him only at the iron gates beyond Palace Buildings. Thenceforward it became a constant occurrence for her to join him, and each day the invalid boy's intelligence increased. It was quite evident that he understood every word she

uttered ; and that, if the organ of speech was impaired, that of hearing was perfect. It was most probably weakness and want of habit that impeded articulation.

It was a quiet festival for the lonely woman when Mrs. Vernon being detained at home by indisposition, the child and his nurses were beguiled into entering her pretty garden. A small collation of cake and wine was quickly arranged in the arbour for the attendants ; while Hugh Desborough, like the monarch of all he surveyed, sat in his carriage under the copper-beech tree.

His new friend was quite alone with him, and her endearments, now that they were unobserved, were tenderer than ever ; but she did not speak to him in any foreign language. With all the power of her richly melodious voice, by the witchery of her lustrous eyes, with flushed cheeks and beating heart, she was striving to make him speak to her. The child's eyes were fixed on hers, and his lips moved in imitation of the short phrases aptest for infantine lips to frame which she strove to teach him. The little fellow seemed to understand her wishes, and to be trying to obey her. Once a long, cooing murmur passed his long silent lips, then a more distinct utterance, twice repeated.

How tenderly the young bereaved woman clasped the motherless child to her heart, when Hugh Desborough, with his eyes fixed on the bright face bent over him, the speaking lips which framed the sounds for his imitation, said clearly “Mamma!” and then, joining his little hands together, as he was wont to do silently in prayer, as perhaps his poor young dead mother had taught him, the child murmured, “Our Father—” Then he broke down, and that day spoke no more.





CHAPTER V

"Nay, ask not back your blossoms,
To the palm-tree said the Nile ;
Let me keep them, said the river,
With its sweet and sunny smile.

"Tis better they should float away
Upon my dusky wave,
Than find upon their native stem
A useless home and grave.

"If your sweet flowers remain with you,
Fruitless your boughs must be ;
'Tis their departure brings the fruit :
Give your bright flowers to me."

HUGH DRSBOROUGH perhaps connected the image of the pretty lady with that of the half-forgotten Anglo-Indian mother who had taught him to lisp the Saviour's prayer. His limited English vocabulary returned very slowly to his memory. With his nurses and Mrs. Vernon he was still absolutely silent, making his wishes known to them by that gesture-language which is as natural to the mute as to the

uneducated savage. With unbounded patience and kindness Mrs. Chichester played her part; contriving to endear herself to the child without awakening the jealousy of his more constant attendants.

These faithful women had lived in such dread of Sir John Desborough's anger, on his return from India, in such hope that the child might recover his voice, that the unspeakable relief from terror was accepted with gratitude. The Indian Ayah told fearful tales of her master's violent temper: and he was known to be wrapped up in the boy, who had been sent to England, contrary to his mother's wish, on account of his extreme delicacy. Only one year after his departure, Lady Desborough and her sister, Miss Forester, came home (if, indeed, a country could be so called, which neither of them had ever visited, as they were the daughters of an English officer and of an Italian lady, and born in India,) in the "Lord Clyde," that great East-Indian passenger-ship, which foundered in the January gale and snowstorm.

One cause or another had been imagined to account for the child's prolonged silence. All sorts of devices had been devised to break it, as well as to enable him to receive instruction. Only quite recently had the subject been mentioned to his absent parent, and then it was treated as the temporary result of debility.

The medical men could not discover any organic defect, but his bodily weakness was excessive. Mrs. Vernon, a kind-hearted but not strong-minded woman, actually trembled whenever she thought of the revelation, which she was beginning to feel herself called upon to make, respecting the utter uselessness of all the measures which had as yet been put in requisition.

Rumours had reached England of serious disagreements between Sir John and Lady Desborough, before the sad event which had left him a widower, and his only child motherless. It was also reported that he disliked the idea of returning home, and that he meant to remain in the East. The offer of his widowed cousin to undertake the care of his household had been gratefully accepted, with stately courtesy, and was liberally compensated.

The May wind was blowing among the shrubberies, and bringing in with it the perfume of the lilacs, through the windows of the small room, on the ground-floor of Sir John Desborough's house, where Mrs. Vernon was sitting, casting up accounts; with little Hugh playing on the carpet beside her. The post had come in: but she was troubled by some arithmetical difficulties, and had not even looked up when the servant laid the letters on the table. A tap on the glass door, which opened into the garden,

roused her: and Hugh crept along and peeped through the lower pane, when he saw his new friend standing outside. If any doubt had ever existed respecting her in the widow's mind, it had ceased to trouble her. Since such a miracle had been wrought in teaching little Hugh to use his long silent tongue, Mrs. Chichester was a constant visitor.

She came in at once now, and taking off her hat, sat down near the window, kissing the little boy and taking him on her knee. Mrs. Vernon went on with her housekeeping calculations, until she arrived at the solution of the difficulty.

"What a strange-looking letter!" she said, taking up one in a large envelope directed in a delicate feminine handwriting. "What can it be? There is no name—only the address to this place."

Mrs. Vernon turned the letter over and over without opening it, and then showed it to her visitor, who studied the address attentively. Her fingers trembled and she gave it back with an effort.

"You are the person in authority here," she said; "had you not better open it?"

Mrs. Vernon, who was remarkably timid, hesitated. "Suppose it should be meant for Sir John. Might he not be angry? Shall I send it to his lawyer?"

"No, no," said her impetuous companion hurriedly.

"Open it yourself. Perhaps, after all, it may only be a circular."

Her decided manner settled the question. Mrs. Vernon obeyed mechanically. Out of the large envelope she took a slip of paper, which appeared to have been rolled up, but was now unfolded. Mrs. Chichester meanwhile, without speaking, picked up and laid on the table another enclosure, after casting upon it one quick agitated glance.

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed the widow. "Will the sea give up its dead! This is one of those terrible messages from the deep of which I have heard. Tell me what it says, my dear; my eyes are so dim, I cannot read it."

Mrs. Chichester read the contents of the letter aloud.

"On board the Passenger Steam-ship, 'Lord Clyde.'

"January —, 1865, 9 o'clock, a.m.

"The ship is sinking fast. In the hope of saving the life of Lady Desborough, I have persuaded the men to launch the port-cutter, in which we are about to put to sea. Miss Forester quitted the ship an hour ago in the starboard-pinnace. Any one who picks up this letter is requested to send it to Desborough House, Newmarket.

"GEORGE CAMPION."

5—2

"There is another enclosure," said Mrs. Chichester hoarsely; "a note in a woman's handwriting. See what it is."

Mrs. Vernon opened the small sheet, which only contained a few lines. She was too nervous to observe her friend's excessive agitation.

"Sunset in the Moor.

"May 18, 1865.

"In compliance with the request contained in the enclosed, Admiral Champernowne forwards to Desborough House the message from the deep sea, which was washed ashore last night on his grounds."

"Sunset!" said Mrs. Vernon wonderingly. "Is that a date or an address? What a strange letter! Tell me what I am to do with it?"

"Nothing.—There is not the slightest hope.—It would be cruel to awaken fresh anxieties," said Mrs. Chichester, in an excited tone; after taking the letter and studying it intently. "I have a list of the survivors. Lady Desborough's name is not among them. Only one of the 'Lord Clyde's' boats weathered the storm."

Mrs. Vernon sighed deeply. "And this is the middle of May! Had there been any hope we must have heard before now!"

"Yes, yes—there is no hope!" persisted Mrs.

Chichester. "I will show you the list to-morrow—I have made every inquiry. I have seen some of the survivors. Lady Desborough must have perished. It was such a fearful storm, and her health was very delicate. She had not left her cabin since she went on board."

"How strange that we should never have spoken of the shipwreck before?" said Mrs. Vernon. "I never suspected for a moment that you knew anything about this sad event."

"It is a subject which is very painful to me," said Mrs. Chichester, while her pale cheeks and faltering voice bore witness to the truth of her words. "Did I never tell you that I lost a sister in the 'Lord Clyde'? We were on our way to England together. Spare me, if you can."

"Ah! we have all had our share of suffering," said Mrs. Vernon, her tears flowing in sympathy; "you have had more than your part. So young to be a widow! I wonder how you can bear it."

"I am not a widow," said Mrs. Chichester coldly. "I was not aware that you were under the impression that I wore mourning for my husband. He is alive and well; but, before I left India, serious disagreements had taken place, which are still unsettled. That is another topic which it is painful to discuss;

had he granted my request and given my poor sister a home, she might still be living,—I might not have left him for ever."

"Oh, there is a remedy for all things but death," said the widow more cheerfully. "To be sure, I might have known those were not the weeds of recent widowhood. I should think you have a quick temper, my dear; but I am sure it is accompanied by a generous forgiving spirit."

"I am afraid my husband's temper and tastes are quite incompatible with mine," said Mrs. Chichester; while her cheeks flushed brightly and her eyes sparkled. "Time has not as yet made me reconciled to the step he took in parting me from my poor, lost child: and there have been other causes for annoyance on both sides."

The kind, motherly woman looked with strong interest, not unmixed with blame, at the graceful woman; now bending again with tearful eyes over the letter which she had never laid down. "You have not been separated very long from your husband, and you have lost your first child. I wonder that all animosity did not die out between you then; but the time will come when you will understand each other better, and when you will need a husband's care and protection."

A crimson blush rose to Mrs. Chichester's forehead, and her eyes filled with tears. She did not speak. Mrs. Vernon, still looking at her compassionately, continued :

"It is very seldom that children can bear the Indian climate more than a very few years. It is a great trial—but your husband, perhaps, judged wisely in separating you from your infant. He did not foresee the result."

"My child was taken from me too soon, and sorely against my will," said the young mother passionately. "He was not treated as I should have treated him, but his father understood nothing about children or their maladies, and considered me too young and inexperienced to have an opinion worth consulting. It is too late to argue the point now. Give me the message from the sea. Hugh's mother shall not be lost to him if I can find her alive. Every syllable relating to the passengers in that ill-fated ship has the very deepest interest for me; and, fortunately, I am entirely mistress of my own actions. Let me see the postmark on that envelope. I shall go down and visit Admiral Champernowne. I shall trace out George Campion. Every indication shall be followed up, and I will let you know the result."

Mrs. Vernon thanked her warmly. Little Hugh

who had been for some time playing about the room, crept nearer and looked up in her face.

“Look at him,” said his kind protectress. “He understands that you are about to leave him. His little heart is breaking.”

“Be comforted, my own! my darling!” the young, impassioned woman exclaimed, as the boy, in dumb grief, laid his head in her lap; pressing him to her heart and covering him with kisses. “I shall not be away long. I promise never to lose sight of you.”

“That is a rash vow,” said the widow gravely. “See how he trusts you. We should never deceive children.”

“Let him trust me,” said Mrs. Chichester, kissing the child again still more tenderly, “as he trusts our Father in Heaven. Little Hugh, say your prayer to me.”

The child, in faltering accents, repeated part of the petition; with his hands clasped inside those of Mrs. Chichester, and his eyes fixed on hers. He was rewarded for his imperfect performance with the tenderest caresses.

“And yet you, so tenderhearted—you who are likely again to be a mother yourself, can be so unmerciful to your husband!” said the widow, with grave displeasure. “I pity you very much; but I

almost wish you had not told me that you were parted in anger from your lawful protector."

"Do not think harshly of me," said the young woman, kneeling down humbly before her. "Perhaps if I had ever known a mother's care I might have been a different creature. India is a bad school for motherless girls, and my husband was neither a kind nor a judicious guardian. Nevertheless," she added proudly, while the burning blush mounted again to her brow, "I have ever been a faithful wife. My children shall not have cause to blush for me. One more kiss, little Hugh! I am going a journey, but not across the sea. I shall soon come back again."

She gathered the folds of her cloak round her, dropped her veil, and, shaking hands with the widow, went away. Mrs. Vernon perceived, after her departure, that she had carried off with her Admiral Champernowne's letter and the Message from the Sea.





CHAPTER VI.

"Many tender souls
Have strung their losses on a rhyming thread
As children cowslips ; the more pains they take
The work more withers. Young men, ay, and maid's,
Too often sow their wild oats in tame verse,
Before they sit down under their own vine
And live for use. Alas, near all the birds
Will sing at dawn ; and yet we do not take
The chaffering swallow for the holy lark."

E. BARRETT BROWNING.

ADMIRAL CHAMPERNOWNE was standing in front of his writing-table, of which one drawer had been pulled partially open, when a timid knock sounded at the library door. The old officer started, and hastily put together some papers and letters which were scattered about. What were they, after all ? Nothing but his dead wife's few notes--for they had been seldom separated--two or three scraps of poetry in a foreign language, an old-fashioned miniature-case, and one or two photographs sent to Juliet by his son--that son whom he had driven into exile,

The library was a very dull room on the second story, quite out of the way of the household ; lined from floor to ceiling with musty old books, which were seldom taken down. That generation in which the collection was made had completely passed away, and no additions had been purchased to increase the stock of antiquated literature. The Admiral was no great reader ; but he sometimes turned over a few Italian stories and poems which stood apart in a small set of curiously carved olive-wood shelves, pausing long at the first pages, whereon a name and date were inscribed. There were days when he laid the books aside without getting on farther.

When the knock was repeated, the master of the house strode across the room, and threw the door widely open. He bowed courteously when he perceived that it was not his daughter, but the foreign lady who solicited admission. The Signorina's delicate grace and refinement since she became a member of his household had prepossessed him in her favour ; and, with all his eccentricities, the Admiral was a perfect gentleman. It was the first time his daughter's governess had intruded upon his privacy ; and, from all he had seen of her he was led to believe that she would not have done so now without good and sufficient reason. Admiral Champernowne placed a chair for

the lady, opposite to his own, which he drew away from the writing-table ; but, as she remained standing, he did the same, waiting for her to commence the conversation.

It flashed across the old veteran's mind, for the first time, as the young lady stood in embarrassed silence, just within the doorway, that she was marvellously pretty. Such a slight, graceful form, with hands and feet like those of a fairy, and a skin of pearly whiteness. Her fair hair was pushed back a little, as if from pain, and the azure veins on her temples throbbed visibly. A pink flush of emotion rose above the fine embroidery which edged her high black dress ; the hand she had laid upon the back of the chair he had placed for her trembled violently.

" Is it Giulietta ? Has she done anything to trouble you, Signorina ? " the old man said kindly. " Do not fear that I shall fail in dealing strict justice, and upholding your authority. Speak plainly, I do not like to be kept in suspense."

" No ; oh no ! I have no complaint to make of Miss Champernowne," said the Signorina. " It is on a little matter of my own that I wish to speak to you."

The Admiral looked relieved. " Go on. What is it, Signorina ? I will do anything in my power to oblige you."

"Mille grazie, Signor!" said the half-Italian girl, taking the shortest way to the Admiral's favour by using his favourite language. "Perdonami! I could have wished to remain absolutely unknown—not to trouble you with any cares of mine; but fate has willed it otherwise, and I wish to consult you."

"Ebbene, Signorina," said the old officer, smiling, with a slight touch of curiosity respecting the fair being trembling before him, whose very name he had scarcely till now cared to know. "You are very young, and you wish to consult me as a friend. Let me hear what I can do for you?"

"A person has called. There has been a visitor to see Miss Champernowne. By accident she was shown in to me; I alone received her," continued the foreigner, in increasing embarrassment.

"This person is a lady?" said the Admiral, smiling again encouragingly. "Upon my word I am very glad to hear it. I feared, Signorina, from your blushes, that we were about to lose you. That would be a great disappointment to me and to daughter."

"Oh no! I do not wish to leave you. I hope there is no cause. It was that message from the sea—the letter which I directed for you the other day. The handwriting on the cover attracted notice. My sister

was startled by its resemblance to mine. She has come straight across England from the Eastern Countries to see the writer."

"Is that all?" said the Admiral. "By all means let her be made welcome. If she is like you, Signorina, I shall be glad to make her acquaintance."

"She is not like me," said the young girl; "but, indeed I think you will be pleased with her. Her beauty is very striking; but that is nothing. My sister is married. She is a young wife; not a widow, for she has a husband living; but he is far away. They are for a time separated, and she would willingly remain near me. Would this be an insuperable objection?"

The Admiral looked at her doubtfully. "Well, we would rather keep you to ourselves," he said; "but, sooner than lose you, I would make a concession. Can I see this young lady? Why have you never named her to us?"

"Because I believed that she had perished. It was on her account that I assumed this deep mourning," said the girl, touching her black dress and with difficulty refraining from tears. "We were both in error; we have mourned for each other, and yet we are both living; the sea has given up its dead! My sister and I were passengers from India in the vessel wrecked

in that January gale which destroyed so many lives. We each believed that the other had gone down at sea in that fearful tempest. No doubt you have heard that the pinace and her crew were saved. I and one other person survived of those on board the port-cutter ; the rest, in sight of safety, perished ! No need to trouble you with more of these sad details. My sister had her jewels and a well-filled purse, besides other resources. I had nothing. That is the only difference : that, and her being a wife. Now we are reunited : she does not wish entirely to lose sight of me ; but she will be no encumbrance. Her health is very delicate at present. Sometimes, not very often, I shall see her if there is no objection ; otherwise, reluctantly, I shall, I fear, be forced to resign my situation."

"By no means," said the Admiral. "If only sisterly love is in the case, I do not consider such a step necessary. That is," he added, more cautiously, "I should like to see the lady. Is she in this house ?"

"I have left her in the music-room. She was shown in there when I was practising the organ. Ah, Sir," she added, clasping her hands enthusiastically, "you should hear her play ! You should listen to her glorious voice ! Mine is not to be compared with it for a moment."

The Admiral, touched on his weakest point, gave way. "Let us go down at once, my dear Signorina. Stay, I must lock this drawer. Now I am at your service."

Through the winding passages of the old part of the mansion—the east wing, in which the library was situated—a strain of faint melody stole as they proceeded together. The Admiral stopped more than once, as a long-drawn note or thrilling cadence filled his musical soul with delight. Never, since the organ had been placed in the gallery, had he heard it so well played. The Signorina's fine touch had been fully appreciated, but, in the masterly performance to which he now listened, a fuller soul was offering up its incense of prayer and praise—a soul of fire—aided by a richer, mellower voice. Every note of the divine harmony was perfect.

Neither was the veteran officer disappointed with the aspect of his new guest when, on the conclusion of the strain, the Signorina undrew the curtain. The sisters were very unlike, but still the resemblance was sufficient to denote that they belonged to the same family. Darker, taller, more fully developed, the lady bending over the keys of the organ was a complete Italian in appearance. The same style of warm southern beauty shone upon him once again which had

won the heart out of the stern breast of the master of Sunset, and kept him unswervingly faithful, as he had been in life, since her death to his wife's memory. Admiral Champernowne breathed deeply, as he even fancied that, in the dark liquid eyes and classical profile, he traced a slight resemblance to Giulietta's beautiful mother. The voice, in singing, had penetrated to his inmost heart, long cased in iron armour. Song after song was asked for, and the resounding notes of the magnificent instrument pealed through the large saloon. Captivated, enchanted, the old officer could almost have broken through his vows of seclusion, and invited the inimitable vocalist to take up her abode with them altogether.

Probably, if he had done so, the offer would have been declined, for the lady was of a very independent spirit ; after an hour's stay, she drew on her gloves and rose to depart, leaving it quite uncertain when she would return. With Admiral Champernowne's approval and permission, she meant to seek for a temporary residence in the neighbourhood, where occasionally she hoped to see her sister. The Admiral conducted her himself to the carriage which was waiting for her, begging her to repeat the favour she had done him on the very earliest opportunity ; and congratulating the Signorina as well as himself on the

acquisition they had made, as he led her back politely into the mansion.

From four to half-past six o'clock in the afternoon was a period of comparative liberty which Juliet Champernowne could call her own. She was free then to walk and play, in sunshine or shadow, with her pets; to feed her poultry, and run races or sit under the trees with Nero, who at all other times was chained in the courtyard. The great dog would have sorely missed his young lady's touch, which then set him at liberty.

During this time the Signorina usually practised the pieces which, in the evening, she played to Admiral Champernowne. When the dressing-bell rang, the village youth who was in attendance ceased blowing, the music stopped, like a clock which has run down, no matter if it were in the middle of the fantasia or symphony. Half an hour was the period considered necessary by the master of the house for a lady's afternoon toilette, and if the Signorina sometimes, in the solitude of her own apartment, indulged in day-dreams, before donning her simple but becoming thin black dress, the Admiral's heavy step past her door, ten minutes after she quitted the music-room, was a signal which dispelled all fleeting fancies.

On this afternoon Juliet heard the half-hour bell

ring as usual, but she was at the far end of one of the long shrubbery walks ; and the squirrels were coming down towards the bench where she was resting, and sitting on the boughs cracking the nuts with which she fed them. Nero was barking at a distance. His young mistress sat recklessly forgetful for five minutes, till one of the old servants, with all of whom she was a favourite, came to fetch her.

Fortunately, the woman said, master and the Signorina had company in the saloon ; as yet the daughter of the house had not been missed.

Juliet hurried indoors, and changed her dress rapidly, surprised at still hearing the distant organ notes ; and, just as she quitted the room, the wheels of a carriage driving away. For the first time in twenty years the Admiral was five minutes late in descending to dinner. Of course he declared that the clocks were too fast, but then there was the infallible chronometer in the hall to point out that the mistake was his own !

The Signorina entered the dining-room by another door at the same moment with her host. She looked very pale and languid, with her soft hair smoothly but less becomingly arranged than usual ; and no flower in the folds of her black dress, though her pupil had gathered one for her, and placed it in

readiness. Certainly her toilette had been a **very** hurried one.

Though the soup was cold, the Admiral found no fault. He was by no means an unreasonable master, and he knew perfectly well that the tureen had been placed on the table punctually. He talked more than usual; telling his daughter of the unusual treat he had enjoyed, and hoping that it might soon be repeated. The Signorina was absolutely silent.

“Your time for recreation is ill-chosen, Juliet,” he said presently. “It is just the hour when visitors whom I wish you to receive may be expected. I think it would be advisable to change it.”

“Oh no, papa! My pets are accustomed to being fed then. Nero comes out of his kennel when the stable clock strikes four, and expects me to unchain him. Visitors do not come often, and not always at the same time.”

“Well, well, it can be arranged so as not to disturb you,” said her father kindly. “I am glad that you have learnt that it is desirable to do anything at an appointed hour. Did I not understand from you, Signorina, that the lady who called here to-day inquired in the first instance for Miss Champernowne? Why was she not informed?”

The Signorina roused herself with difficulty to

reply. "My sister asked for the lady of the house," she said in her usual gentle tone. "That is—for-give me for my inadvertence—I mean that she showed to your servant the cover of the letter in which the message received from the sea was enclosed, and asked which of the ladies of your family had directed it. Matthews knew it to be in my hand-writing."

"Quite right! That is a very straightforward, satisfactory explanation," said the Admiral kindly. "I am glad no one is to blame, and that you had a completely undisturbed interview with your sister. Poor things! and so you actually were both in mourning for each other when you met! That is a very strange coincidence. We shall now have the pleasure of seeing you, I trust, in brighter spirits: the colour of the dress matters little."

"I think not; I prefer the shade—the black," said the Signorina, nervously fingering her soft crêpe frills. "We have both had much sorrow—and to-day it is a shock, a surprise, which I cannot readily overcome."

"I do not wonder at it. Help the Signorina to claret, Matthews," said Admiral Champernowne. "I think that you told me your sister was married, but I did not catch the name,"

"I scarcely think it was mentioned," said the Signorina, her fair face flushing as she drank the wine hastily. "My sister is married to an officer in India. Her name is Chichester."

"She looks quite foreign—more of an Italian than yourself, though her accent is perfect. She has no foreign idiom. But her singing, her manner, her expression, are full of southern fire. She would make a splendid Prima Donna. Have you been much together?"

"No," said the Signorina; "at least, not since her marriage. She lost several children in India; and when I was ordered to spend a year for my health in England she accompanied me."

Her sufferings were so visible, as she spoke slowly and tremulously, that the Admiral kindly abstained from further questioning, though he took a real interest in her story. Very soon the Signorina made the accustomed signal to her pupil, and they went out of the room together.

"Are you not very glad that your sister was saved?" said Juliet, less cognisant of the signs of emotion than her father, and naturally inquisitive. "Signorina, I am so sorry I did not see her."

"You will do that soon. She will return," said the young governess, sitting down wearily on a couch;

with such an expression of anxiety on her face that it might be doubted whether the event of the day had been fraught with unmixed joy. "Giulietta, idola mia, I am happy. The sight of my beautiful sister was as if an angel entered in; but I have had much trouble with her. She is as wild, wilful, and passionate as you once were. Even now she is not acting in a way that I like. I fear her continuing near us will bring me into trouble with your father."

"I am glad she is not as good as she is handsome. I was beginning to be jealous of your sister, but now I think I shall like her," said Juliet. "Do not be afraid, Signorina: my father has taken a great fancy to Mrs. Chichester; and, when that is the case, he sees no faults. Your beautiful sister will wind him round her finger."

The Signorina smiled. "I think she interested him, and he liked her voice. Let us hope for the best, Giulietta. All may end well yet."

The girl hung over and kissed her fondly. "Only fancy, papa never scolded, and yet we were both late; in fact, he was not dressed himself in time for dinner. I wish your sister would come every day and sing him into good humour. Why should she not take The White House? That is quite close."

"Too near, my child! that would not do in the least. Besides, it does not belong to your father."

"No; but Uncle Richard's trustees would let The White House to any tenant of whom my father approved," persisted Giulietta. "I heard Mr. Harrington say so the last time he dined here, and that it was a shame the place stood empty. It ought to be rented by some lady, who would not interfere with the shooting. Papa made no remark, he never does when allusion is made to poor Gerald's property and interests. I could not bear, then, to think of a stranger living at the pretty house in the orchard, but your sister would be different. You would be so much together; and I could leave you, and sit in the meadow with the horses, when you wanted to talk about old friends and times. I think it would be so pleasant!"

The entrance of her father silenced Juliet, and the rest of the evening was spent, as usual, in music; but the old officer missed the beautiful voice which had enchanted him in the morning. The Signorina's accents were low and fluttering, her hands trembled on the notes, and she asked permission to retire early.

The following week, to Juliet's great delight not in the hour of recreation, Mrs. Chichester called again.

This time her business was with Admiral Champernowne, and his permission was easily gained that she should rent The White House. It was the only place in the neighbourhood which would at all suit her moderate pretensions; and she was quite willing to comply with the solitary condition annexed to its temporary occupation—that it must be vacated immediately, if such should be the will of its owner on his return from abroad.





CHAPTER VII.

"Thoughts of the lonely heart—whither away?
Up to the starry crown, gemm'd night's brow,
Higher and higher borne—doubts cast below,
Through the wide circle of worlds without end,
Farther and farther still, let us ascend,
Till we smilingly rest in that bright realm above,
Finding peace only *there*, in God's limitless love."

Translated from the German.

R. M. K.

WHATEVER misgivings might have damped the Signorina's joy at the first meeting with her sister, fled away in the course of that long pleasant summer. Even Admiral Champernowne's severity relaxed, and communications became frequent between the mansion on the hill and The White House in the orchard. Mrs. Chichester led a still more secluded life than her neighbours, politely declining all the civilities offered to her; and making known, speedily and decidedly, that her extremely delicate health rendered it impossible for her to enter into society.

- Juliet no longer murmured at her morning walks being restricted to the side of the hill facing the east. The period allotted for exercise in the forenoon had been lengthened, and she liked nothing better than to accompany the Signorina on her daily visit to her sister. They had usually a quiet half-hour alone together; while the young girl basked in the morning sunshine, gathered the large forget-me-nots by the brook, and fed the old horses; which followed her about, cropping the long grass near the water contentedly, or eating out of her hand, over the palings, the oats she pilfered for them from the offices.

In the afternoon or evening Mrs. Chichester frequently came up to the Admiral's house to practise on the organ, or on the grand piano in the saloon. The old officer liked nothing better than to pace up and down the colonnade listening to her playing, and to the duets and trios performed by the Italian ladies and his daughter. Juliet's taste and skill were developing themselves; and she was learning, for the first time in her life, to love music, and to feel that she had a soul within her which kindled at the sounds she heard, or in which she took part. In this respect, as well as in many others, the obstinate indolence fostered by severity was wearing away.

There were times, nevertheless, when the girl's

mood was one of exceeding bitterness—when she lay on the grass under the trees in the meadow, with the flowers she had gathered rent into fragments, and her heart beating passionately. The old horses crept up to her unnoticed ; and even Nero, who was permitted to accompany her in her morning walk, would put his huge paws on her knee, or even on her shoulder, and solicit her to play with him, or strive in his rough way to comfort her, without rousing her from her sorrow. At these times Juliet was thinking of her absent brother.

She almost hated then the two lovely women whose soft Italian words were indistinctly audible through the hum of bees, the notes of birds. Or she would go farther away, not to hear their voices at all ; those voices, so witchingly persuasive, which had soothed her father's rugged nature. At such times she did not like the fair woman who was mistress of her brother's house, gathering his flowers, lodging in the rooms which he had never entered as master—where, perhaps, he might never enter at all !

Juliet thought of her Uncle Richard, who had been so kind to her and her brother in their dull childhood ; of the hours, the only pleasant ones she remembered, spent at The White House, when they were free of the place, and could ramble about un-

stricted by vexatious regulations. All this liberty, it was true, had come to an end long ago ; Gerald was far away, no sufferer by Mrs. Chichester's temporary occupation of the premises ; at any moment, if he so willed it, she had bound herself to leave them.

This stipulation was a great comfort to Juliet. She often reverted to it, almost uncourteously, the Signorina thought, in Mrs. Chichester's presence. It seemed to give assent to the girl's passionate longing that Gerald should, some day or other, come back.

At the end of August Mrs. Chichester's little baby daughter was born—the first infant which had ever seen the light in The White House. Uncle Richard had never married ; it was a complete bachelor's abode, more adapted for a gentleman than for a lady, but its present occupant liked it well. She never saw any company, and the moderately-sized sitting-rooms, plainly furnished, amply sufficed for her secluded mode of life.

Juliet was passionately fond of the baby ; she forgot all her jealous fancies when this new claimant gained hold of her heart. To be allowed to carry it out in the sunshine, or to sit watching the child asleep in its cot, in the pretty room over the porch which was now called the nursery, was a delight the lonely girl had never anticipated. It was a harder

struggle than ever, now, to get back home in time to complete her tasks.

The baby was not in the least like its beautiful, stately mother. Very fair, very small, very frail—the soft, abundant light hair, the tiny hands and feet, like waxen models, the veins meandering visibly under the white skin, made it resemble the Signorina. It was true that the relationship was a very near one, but the likeness was quite extraordinary, and grew stronger day by day; especially when Mrs. Chichester recovered, as she did rapidly, her graceful, animated beauty. She grew much stronger during the autumn and winter than she had been on her first arrival in the country; and when spring came she took long walks with Juliet; while the Signorina, whose health was always delicate, stayed at The White House with the baby: loving nothing better than to sit in the sunny orchard, awaiting the return of her sister and her young pupil, laden with primroses and cowslips to weave into garlands and balls to amuse the infant.

When the fine spring weather had lasted some weeks the young mother suddenly grew restless. For the first time the utter seclusion of her life and its monotonous routine appeared to weary her. At this season, she confessed, an irresistible spirit of freedom

took possession of her. Like the birds, she longed to take wing and fly away. The narrow limits of the small domain in the valley could not contain her. After some vague yearnings of this description—a few days, during which she sat sighing in the pleasant corner where her work-table stood, between fire and window, or spent her time in aimless wanderings in the garden—Mrs. Chichester could bear it no longer. The Signorina looked grave and anxious when told that she and Juliet must come and look after baby daily for the next fortnight, as its mother would be absent; and the following morning the sunny corner was empty, the pleasant voice no longer welcomed them. The young mother had left her child; and was gone to visit the friends in Cambridgeshire, with whom she had been staying, she said, when the message from the sea reached Desborough House, and roused her to the knowledge that the sister whom she mourned as dead was still living.

Admiral Champernowne fumed and fretted when he heard of her departure. The tidings came upon him very suddenly; just when he was expecting a musical treat in hearing the last act of a new opera, which the Signorina, his daughter, and Mrs. Chichester had been practising together. For the first time it occurred to him unpleasantly that a veil of

mystery hung over the handsome sisters, which, as long as their proceedings gave him entire satisfaction, he had not troubled himself to unravel. He had perfect confidence in his own penetration, and he entertained great distrust of the world's opinion. On this ground he preferred to judge for himself, and declined to ask for references as to the character and disposition of the person to whom he intrusted the care of his daughter and of his household. The Signorina at their first meeting had inspired him with unbounded confidence, and she had now quite established herself in his good opinion. Mrs. Chichester was, if possible, a still greater favourite—he even liked the quiet baby; but he wished his fair neighbour at the house in the orchard had consulted him before her departure. Even the Signorina's neatly directed letter to her sister annoyed the old officer when he placed it in the bag. He would rather it had been addressed to any post-office in England than Newmarket.

Punctually to the day appointed Mrs. Chichester returned to The White House. She said nothing of the friends whom she had visited, and seemed quite reconciled to her quiet existence. The daily music lessons and evening concerts were resumed. Once more the Admiral took his quarter-deck walks in the

colonnade contentedly, listening to the liquid words and lingering notes of the lovely Italian melodies. Juliet was fast becoming a proficient in music, as well as improving in docility. Many of the troublesome rules which tried her temper and chafed her spirit had been relaxed under the Signorina's gentle influence. In this manner another summer wore on towards its close.

It was little Violet's first birthday. The sisters and Juliet Champernowne were sitting under the trees ; baby, in her best white frock, was rolling about on the lawn at her mother's feet, queen of the festival. Never had The White House looked more sunny and peaceful than when the gate into the lawn opened, and a gentleman, followed by a groom, cantered through, and rode up the drive between the richly-laden trees of the orchard, which glowed crimson in the sunlight. It was so seldom any visitor approached the secluded dwelling that Mrs. Chichester and her sister looked surprised—almost uneasy ; Juliet coloured deeply.

"It is Mr. Harrington, Uncle Richard's friend. My brother Gerald has been heard of at last!" she said, and ran to meet him.

Mrs. Chichester turned deadly pale. She looked round at the pretty white house, with its verandah

and lattice-work covered with jasmine and honeysuckle, at the flower-beds she had planned on the lawn, now full of geraniums, heliotrope, and verbena; the bending apple trees, and the range of beehives under the low wall which divided garden and field.

"I am not destined ever to have a home," she said bitterly. "Depend upon it, Elena, that girl's instinct is right. Mr. Champernowne is in England, and I shall be turned out of this pleasant place! I never knew before how much I loved it."

Her eyes filled with tears. She took the baby on her knee, and bent over it to hide her emotion; but the tears fell on the little one's face, and made her cry. Mrs. Chichester impatiently resigned her to the Signorina.

"This child does not love me as my first-born did," she said. "Take her, Elena; she is more yours than mine."

The sweet-tempered infant, at the first caressing touch, had recovered its slightly-disturbed serenity. The clear grey eyes were smiling up into those which were so singularly like them.

Meanwhile, Mr. Harrington rode up slowly, with Juliet's hand upon his horse's neck.

The girl's face was radiant with happiness, even while her eyes overflowed. In the realisation of a

fervent, long-cherished wish—her life-dream—she had, for the moment, entirely forgotten that the tidings which gave her so much pleasure might not be so welcome to her friends.

"It is quite true. Gerald is in England. He is coming back. Letters have been received from him at last."

Mrs. Chichester welcomed her visitor somewhat stiffly. "You are not quite such a messenger of good news to me as to Miss Champernowne, Mr. Harrington," she said gravely. "But I have always expected this. You come to give me notice that I must leave The White House?"

"Well, not exactly," said Mr. Harrington, after an exchange of greetings. "Perhaps it may come to that, and I thought you might like to be prepared. But, as yet, I am quite ignorant of Mr. Champernowne's intentions. No doubt he will give you fair notice if he wishes to reside here."

Juliet's countenance fell. "Oh, he is sure to live at The White House! We used to play at being master and mistress here together. That is," she said, colouring as she remembered the feelings of her companions, "I do not want you to go away, Mrs. Chichester; I wish we could all live together; but we have been so long separated that, at the first

moment, I can think of nothing but my brother. When am I to see him?"

"Very soon, no doubt," said her old friend kindly. "Only a telegram has reached me as yet, to the effect that Gerald and a friend will be at my house to-morrow. I thought it best to ride over at once; and prepare Mrs. Chichester, and, still more, your impetuous self, for this meeting."

Juliet's impulsive joy was fast subsiding.

"Oh! what will my father say? I am sure he is sometimes sorry for having driven Gerald away. Will you tell him?"

Mr. Harrington shook his head.

"I think not. Your father and I have not been on the best of terms lately. This point I have not decided. Which of you ladies has most influence over him?"

Juliet came closer to the sisters.

"Indeed, I hardly know," she said timidly. "Not I, certainly. I would not mention Gerald's name to my father for worlds."

Mrs. Chichester looked extremely surprised. Though she knew that there had been a serious misunderstanding between the Admiral and his absent son before the latter left his home and country, she had never seen the old officer in his

angry moods, and could not realise the terrors inspired by them.

"I do not feel sufficiently intimate with your father, my dear, to interfere in family matters," she said affectionately, but with quiet dignity. "Besides, I am a party concerned, since your brother's return—which, for your sake, I rejoice in sincerely—will banish me from a place I dearly love. But Elena has known you longer, she is a great favourite; let her speak to your father and try to bring about a reconciliation."

The Signorina in her turn grew pale. She gave the child to its mother, and stood revolving in her mind the task committed to her, with the air of a person who understood its difficulties.

Mr. Harrington shook hands with the two sisters, and, stooping down, kissed the young girl on the forehead. "Good-bye, Juliet; settle it between you. I shall tell Mr. Champernowne that I left his cause in good hands. The Admiral never could resist a pretty woman's pleading; especially," he added, smiling, "with such a voice as the Signorina's to enforce her argument, and the Italian accent. God bless you, my dear child; I trust that to you, at all events, your brother's return will prove an unalloyed source of happiness."

He bent his head and rode back over the grass under the laden boughs, with Juliet walking by the side of his horse.

The sisters were quite silent for some moments. The Signorina stood with her hands clasped, and her arms hanging down in an unconsciously statuesque attitude. Mrs. Chichester, flushed and vexed, played with the baby half absently.

"If it were not for that poor girl's sake, I could wish the young gentleman had stopped away," she said. "However, this quiet place may not suit him, especially as he is on such bad terms with his father. It is scarcely a stone's throw from the boundaries of the Admiral's domain. Elena, you need not plead his cause too eloquently! Consider that if you keep Mr. Champernowne here, you lose me."

The Signorina, whose thoughts had been in the clouds, looked down at her sister as if suddenly brought back to earth.

"Oh, I cannot bear estrangements!" she said. "If I am to plead for this wanderer, I shall do it with all my soul. Besides," she continued, with a total change of countenance and expression of voice, "you know that, from the first, I disapproved of your settling at The White House. It is not, it never can be, your real home."

Mrs. Chichester turned her head away.

"It has at all events been a happy one, Elena, the happiest I have ever known; and I shall be very sorry to leave it."

She got up and went into the house, carrying the child with her, the scent of the jasmine seeming sweeter than it had ever done before.

The Signorina went to meet her pupil.

"Let us go back at once, Giulietta. My sister is tired, and not quite well. We will come and see her again, early, to-morrow. It is time we were at home."

"Will *you* tell my father that Gerald is in England?" said Juliet, as they walked under the shady hedgerow; "I think he would bear it best from your lips."

The Signorina was silent; Juliet saw that she was weeping.

"Oh, I am so sorry! I have been very selfish," she said. "But, at all events, we shall not lose you if my brother comes to The White House."

"Indeed I cannot tell, my child," said the Signorina. "Be that as it may—chi lo sa?—I will do all I can to help you and your brother. And yet, Giulietta, fanciulla mia, something warns me there are great changes coming," she added, her tears

flowing passionately. "I may live to regret Gerald's arrival! since, most likely, he and I will not remain at home together, and it has been a home to me. I love your father's house. Never will come an evening when, far away, I shall not think of Sunset in the Moor."



PART THE THIRD.

THE STEERAGE PASSENGER.

Voices from the silent Land,
So far off yet so near,
Breaking Death's dull leaden band,
Fall upon my ear.
Do I hear some sweet bells ringing ?
Or the evening breeze at play—
Or is it the heath-bells swinging
At the close of the dying day ?

From many a far-off resting-place
Those sweet soft murmurs come,
From those who once met face to face
In one beloved home.
What are those voices telling me,
In tones I know so well ?
When winds are revelling wild and free
Over each heathery swell.

Or the rustling Autumn breeze,
As it wanders across the heath,
Meets the faint reply of the rolling seas
Murmuring with 'bated breath.

R. M. K.



CHAPTER VIII.

" He bears down on me through the slanting years,
The stronger for the distance

I paused,—

Perhaps I darkened as the Lighthouse does
That turns upon the sea—"

E. B. BROWNING.

This saloon, or music-room, as it was usually called, glowed with lamp and candle light, and the Admiral listened complacently to his favourite arias and duets. The organ gallery was not lighted up ; the Signorina and her pupil were singing to the piano, and their selection of music had exactly suited the taste of the old officer. The yellow August moon was shining over the moor and in at the high window. With Giulietta's liquid tones reminding him of her beautiful, dead Italian mother's singing, Admiral Charnier was as near happiness as he had been since he lost his wife. When the bell rang for prayers the music ceased, the servants trooped in to hear their

master read—in a somewhat arbitrary tone, as if it were the order of the day, or night—his customary short form of devotion. Juliet bade her father her usual deferential good-night, a shaded hand-lamp was placed in readiness for him, and he was left, as he supposed, alone.

The rustle of a silk dress dispelled this illusion, and reminded the Admiral that the Signorina had not said her accustomed soft “Buona sera.” He looked up kindly, and saw that the Italian girl was putting away her work and placing the books upon the table in the order that he liked to maintain. He watched her approvingly as she threw some light coverings over his favourite ornaments, set the music in more exact shape than Juliet had left it in, and finally approached the table at which he was seated. Her quiet movements did not disturb his serenity.

“La Signorina Giulietta improves daily,” said the young governess, with grave emphasis; “soon, she will be able to dispense with my services.”

The Admiral looked at her sharply. His agreeable reverie was effectually put to flight.”

“What do you mean, Signorina?” he said roughly. “The child is not half-educated. Besides, that was only part of our compact. You undertook the management of my household.”

"Ebbene, Signor," continued the Italian, while at the mere words the Admiral's wrath subsided, and unwonted moisture stole into his eyes. "Giulietta shortly will be able for this also. She is almost a woman. Ah! we forget, when it is so pleasant, that time flies fast."

"You do find it pleasant, then. I was afraid you were tired of us," said Admiral Champernowne, struggling with the painful feelings which had sprung up in his mind at the mention of a possible change in his household. "I admit that the child has grown wonderfully sensible and docile under your management; but she is not a woman: and, even if she were, I should be more at a loss how to control her than ever, without you."

"I thank you many times for your goodness," said the Signorina, sitting down deliberately opposite to the old officer, who awaited the communication she was evidently about to make like a man under fire. "It has been to me very grateful to be here—to be trusted—loved. I shall never have a happier home than Sunset, and yet, the time will come, soon it may be, when I must leave you."

"Nonsense!" said the Admiral unceremoniously. "You are not going to be married, I hope. I know nothing else that need separate us."

"No, Signor," said the girl, without embarrassment. "That is not the cause which disturbs me. It is a circumstance connected with my sister. She is unwilling to leave The White House without me."

"Then tell her to stop there. I don't want her to go away," exclaimed the Admiral. "Are you all bent on driving me frantic? I should be very sorry to lose either of you."

"My sister has no choice," said the Signorina, while the colour rose to her cheeks. "Her tenure was only conditional. The owner of The White House is in England."

"The devil he is!" exclaimed the Admiral, bounding up as if struck by a shot. "So this is what you have waited to tell me! Because that scapegrace has turned up, I am to lose every comfort in life. It is just what I might have expected."

"Perdonami," said the Signorina, rising, and taking the old man's hand, which trembled with passion. "Time makes many changes. Is it not possible that your long-absent son, like our Giulietta, may have improved? May he not have become docile, sensible?"

"He might, if you had had the training of him! The poor fellow has not had much chance. I sometimes think, when I look at the dear child, that more

might have been made of her brother. He was the image of my sainted wife. But it is too late, and you say you are going to leave us. All will be in confusion again. This headstrong boy will be the ruin of his sister."

"Not so," said the Signorina gently. "Love is a mighty magician! It is her adoration for her brother which has wrought a change in Juliet. I have worked upon her passions, which are strong, but she has learnt to control them. I have told her that the reward for her obedience would be to win back your love for Gerald."

"That was a very rash pledge of yours, Signorina," said the old man, unable to help smiling. "I wonder you had the courage to count upon making a Christian parent out of the old lion. So you have ventured to tell Giulietta that if she became a good daughter, I would forgive Gerald's indiscretion. Upon my word, I see no connection between his follies and her virtues."

"Sì, Signor, you have said it. That is exactly what I have promised. When I saw the girl's passionate southern nature so excited, I tamed it. I told her anger should not, would not, last between children and parents. Giulietta was very vindictive at first. She thought her brother hardly used. I

assure you it took a long time to pacify her ; but I succeeded. She is now a tender, loving woman. Am I to say that I deceived her ? Must I tell her there is no love for your own child at the bottom of your heart ? Although you look stern, almost to frighten us at times, was I wrong in declaring that a manly submission would soften you ? Oh ! indeed I would rather leave you at once, this very moment, than confess that I made such a mistake. It is not possible. Consider ; it is years since this poor, foolish boy left his home. He has been friendless since ; he thought himself misunderstood. He must have been sorely tried and tempted ! If he had a mother living he would, perhaps, never have been to you a source of trouble ; but he had no one to train him to obedience.”

“That is true enough,” said the Admiral. “The children lost their angel mother too early. Signorina, you must not forsake them.”

“Oh ! I cannot stay and see my work undone,” said the girl, with sudden emotion. “If there is hatred in the house I cannot stop. Signor, you must give me my discharge.”

“I’ll be shot if I do anything of the sort!” said the Admiral. “The fact is. Signorina, we cannot manage without you. I suppose you must make your own

conditions. My flag is down. First of all, I am to forgive this young rascal?"

"Si, Signor," said the Italian girl demurely; "that is the first condition. It is not difficult. Ah! I know you better than you do yourself. It is only the chestnut rind that is hard; break that, and the nut is sweet. But, unfortunately, this is not all. When Mr. Champernowne comes to The White House, my sister must leave it; and, as I told you, since she is unwilling to depart alone and dwell among strangers, we must go together."

"Let the boy come here. What is to prevent his having his old room? Why on earth does he require a house to himself? I hope he is not bringing a wife with him from the Antipodes."

"No, only a friend—a gentleman--his name is not known to me."

"Well, I suppose you can put him up somewhere. No need to be over-particular. Some Californian gold-digger. Where in the world has the lad been hiding himself? He will have some queer travellers' tales to tell us. Signorina, settle it all as you like; I give you carte blanche; only mind you tell Mrs. Chichester this young scamp shall not turn her and little Violet out of The White House. If he is his father's son, he will not disturb a lady against her

inclination ; and it is out of the question that we should spare you. That point is decided. Send for the man to tune the organ and pianoforte. That young fellow had not such a bad voice ; you and your sister might make something of him between you. And now, my dear, for Heaven's sake go to bed, and don't plague me any more about the matter. Just look at the clock ; I declare it is nearly midnight!"





CHAPTER IX.

"At eventide there shall be light,"
I heard a soft voice say ;
And radiance, ruddy, warm and bright,
Upon the wood-paths lay ;
As though each glittering fragile leaf,
Hanging from bough and spray,
Had caught upon its shining sheaf,
Beams of the dying day.

The bending birch and sapling beech,
Caught on their stems that ray,
And sent it shimmering each to each
Hard by—then far away ;
The fern-fronds kindling caught that spark,
Like fire-drops in the shade,
Changing their hues from light to dark,
Like hopes too long delayed.

R. M. K.

A GORGEOUS crimson sunset threw its rays over the moor ; the granite pillars of the colonnade, the long rows of windows in front of the Admiral's mansion sparkled in its lustre, when Gerald Champernowne and his friend walked across the heath from the

station, having declined to enter the carriage sent to meet them. Both were young and active, in the very prime of life, and both were accustomed to roughing it.

Gerald Champernowne had the lofty stature of his father, but he was more strongly made and very unlike him in feature. His eyes, darkly beautiful, like those of his Italian mother, and veiled by long black lashes, lit up a sun-flushed face, weather-beaten and spoiled, as far as regarded complexion, by exposure to various climates. As he strode across the heather beating back a path with his stick, disdaining all frequented tracks and sometimes setting his heel on a snake, he looked as thoroughly like a dare-devil bushranger as could be conceived.

He was very roughly dressed for travelling, but, nevertheless, he bore the air of a gentleman, and his voice and smile were pleasant. Otherwise, excepting the darkly-gleaming Italian eyes, he was not good-looking.

His companion was strikingly handsome. In any society Alan Desborough would scarcely have passed unnoticed. He also was of manly appearance, with bright chestnut hair, which curled closely in his neck. His dress, though equally coarse, was more carefully put on than the loose garb of the Admiral's

son ; he was a thorough sportsman, and he bore himself like one.

Young Champernowne stood still, watching a light, lithe figure that came bounding over the heather to meet them.

"Just wait a minute, old fellow ! Give us breathing time. I believe that is little Juliet. I have not seen the child for ages."

His friend smiled. "All right, Gerald, I should like to have another look at the Tors—I only wish I had such a pretty girl coming to meet me."

He turned his back resolutely, and stood admiring the sunlit peaks on the moor, with the murmur of happy voices in his ear.

Gerald was too good-natured to try his patience long. He came back, after meeting Juliet, with the dark-eyed Italian-looking girl hanging fondly on his arm, and introduced her to his friend.

"Do you mean to say, Juliet, that we are really to go home ?" he said, stopping again and looking at the gleaming lights on the windows of the Hall. "Who has wrought this miracle ?"

"Oh, you have to thank the Signorina," said Juliet, "a lady who has educated me, and keeps my father's house. She pleaded your cause successfully last night."

"Upon my word, I am very much obliged to her," said the young man. "The Admiral's telegram was short and sweet, but eminently satisfactory. What made this lady take my part?"

"Her own goodness, and her knowledge of my love for you," said Juliet, her face flushing. "Gerald, you must love the Signorina for my sake. You do not know how much good she has done at Sunset—my father is an altered man; and then she is so beautiful—like an angel, to my fancy."

"I have not the slightest objection to loving her, if that is the case," said the young man lightly. "But come, let us press on; my heart yearns for home. Giulietta mia, I once saw the sea look like the moor in this blood-red sunset, when I thought I was taking a farewell of life, and should never see thy dear face again. Desborough, is not this a glorious prospect?"

The young man, who was looking very earnestly at Juliet, started, and responded warmly. The girl blushed crimson under his gaze. By this time they were close to the house; Gerald saw his father walking up and down under the colonnade, and sprang to meet him with a bound up the steps. In a moment they were locked in a close embrace, during which no one saw their faces. Juliet and

Alan Desborough turned instinctively away, and stood admiring the view over the moor.

"Where is your friend, Juliet?" said her brother, coming round to her while the Admiral greeted his travelling companion; "the lady to whom I am so much indebted? I wish to be introduced to her."

"You will not see her this evening," said Juliet. "The Signorina is gone down to The White House, where her sister, Mrs. Chichester, is living with her dear little baby. We could not persuade her that we should not be better alone the first evening. Tomorrow we will go and fetch her back."

The young man assented unwillingly. "What a mistake! I hate waiting—and I am in duty bound and prepared to like her. However, there is no help for it. Little one, will you show me the way? I believe I have forgotten it. Am I to have my old room? I should rather like it."

"Yes, it is all ready. Papa suggested it himself. The Signorina saw to everything before leaving. Your friend, Mr. Desborough, will be near you."

"Come along then; I don't like losing sight of you," said her brother, fondly drawing her on. "Yes, this is it. I am beginning to recollect my way, but I have been in so many queer places that I scarcely

recognise home yet. The old house seems wonderfully improved; so much lighter and brighter."

"It is all the Signorina's doing. Everything she touches turns to gold," said Juliet, laughing. "How I wish she was here to welcome you!"

"Well, never mind that now; after all, she is a perfect stranger. By-the-bye, what is her name?"

"Oh, we never call her anything but the Signorina," said Juliet. "That is quite enough; every creature knows her by it. But you must not lose time. Though he is not so particular as he used to be, papa does not like to be kept waiting for dinner. Mind you are not late. The half-hour bell is ringing."

"Not for the world," said her brother, looking with satisfaction at the large bath and ewer of water in the cool, old-fashioned room, with its coved ceiling and deep-set windows, which had been prepared for him. "I say, Desborough, this is just my idea of perfection. My dear old room! Yours is just like it. Run away, little woman, and get dressed. Mind you make yourself look pretty."

His friend thought it would be difficult to make Juliet look anything but handsome. He restrained the compliment, however, and Juliet flew along the passage laughing. In the next twenty minutes a mighty splashing and vigorous sound of the brush

might have been heard on either side of the gallery, and then the two young men came out completely cooled and renovated after their dusty walk.

Gerald Champernowne looked much older than his friend. He had led a hard life, and showed marks of a rough conflict with fortune. The Admiral's heart smote him when he saw how prematurely the black hair and beard were streaked with grey, but he felt proud of his son's manly appearance. The evening passed quickly away, even without the aid of music, as he listened to the young men's tales of wild adventure and hazard.

Excited and amused the Admiral again forgot the hour, and the clock struck twelve before the party separated. Even Juliet had not found time to regret that the kind friend who had certainly paved the way to this happy reconciliation had not stayed to reap the fruit of her good deed.

Gerald Champernowne, as he laid his head upon the pillow which it had not pressed for years, recollected the kind woman who had smoothed his father's rugged temper. With his childhood's prayers coming back to his memory, as he fell off to sleep, he murmured a blessing for the stranger as he looked dreamily round upon the unforgotten sights and signs of home.

The Admiral was not a man who did things by halves. Having made up his mind to receive his son, he welcomed him back heartily, and gave himself up thoroughly to the task of making his home pleasant to him. The warm weather suited his constitution, and he woke free from the slightest twinge of gout or rheumatism, and in the best possible humour. Under these propitious circumstances he proposed to go down with the young people, after breakfast, to The White House.

Leaning on his son's arm, proud of the support of which for years he had deprived himself, Admiral Champernowne walked slowly down the lane, pointing out changes and improvements. The overflowing of the brook had been checked, and the superfluous water was now conducted into a hollow overhung by beeches, where an artificial lake had been formed. A few of the Admiral's trees had been cut down to afford a better prospect from the windows of the house in the valley. In his present mood the old officer chose to forget, or banished to the background of the picture, that long and painful estrangement which had prevented his setting foot on his brother's small domain during the latter part of Mr. Champernowne's life, and made his own and only son an exile.

Perhaps Gerald's memory, like that of his sister,

served him more faithfully ; but he did not disturb his father's serenity by any untoward reminiscences. The Admiral held the happy conviction on most occasions that, let who would be in error, he himself was in the right. Just at present he was quite satisfied with his own conduct, and any slight misgivings which momentarily visited him, as to whether his long-maintained habits of irascibility and vindictiveness had been equally unblamable, were not suffered to disturb his complacency ; as he walked along, pointing to right and left with his stick where he had made or contemplated alterations on his own property, and recommending such as he considered advisable, when, leaving his own fields behind, they came to the sloping paddocks in front and at the back of his son's house.

Juliet and Alan Desborough had walked on more quickly at first, but they had not reached the end of the lane. The Admiral's daughter knew that he would expect her to wait for him, and it was pleasant to linger in the shadow of the trees. Alan was talking to her about her brother with an enthusiasm equal to her own, and doing ample justice to Gerald's good qualities, which had won for him the confidence of all with whom he had been associated. Mrs. Charnierne's Neapolitan relations had received both

the young Englishmen warmly, and, had it not been for his accession to property and independence in England, and wish to see her, he might through their influence have obtained a high civil appointment. Juliet heard with gratification of the warm solicitations her brother had received to establish himself permanently in his mother's country. Even as it was, he had contemplated returning thither with her if he had not found her happy; the offer made to him being still left open, awaiting his acceptance.

"You and your brother are half Italian; as for me, I belong to no country under heaven," said the young man; as they stood still, by the gate of The White House. "If Gerald had stayed in Naples, or were to return there, I should have done the same. Possibly I may imitate his example. As it is, I am the worst off; for I have no pretty sister, no pleasant home in England to repay me for losing my friend."

Juliet blushed at the unwonted compliment. "Oh, you will not lose your friend," she said; "Gerald is very constant in his likes and dislikes. I am afraid we are an obstinate race."

"So much the better," said Alan, laughingly. "At least, I prefer firmness, even in what is not altogether laudable, to vacillation. Not that I am an example of it myself. Gerald winds me round his finger. I

have never had a fixed home or pursuit; but that is perhaps the natural consequence of having been brought up in expectations which were not to be realised.

His companion's look of interest made Alan continue speaking.

"I was to have been my uncle, Sir John Desborough's, heir; but he took it into his head to marry. Of course, he was perfectly at liberty to do so if he chose—only, no one expected it. He was such a martinet, so wedded to his own system and habits that every one regarded him as a confirmed bachelor; and for forty years of his life I believe he was of the same opinion. Unluckily for me he then met with a beautiful Italian face, with eyes of fire—such as I have dreamed of—and he fell in love like a boy, married, and had a son. This was the end of my expectations of affluent fortune."

He laughed a little bitterly, pulling down with the hook of Juliet's parasol a waving wreath of clematis which she was trying to reach. Before they had secured it, the frail blossoms strewed the ground.

"It is just like my long-expected title and estate," he said; "the real misfortune is that my parents, beguiled by this futile dream, brought me up to no profession. When I was left an orphan it was too

late to decide upon one, and the scattering of the blossoms of promise made a vagrant of me at once. Ever since my uncle married I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth."

Admiral Champernowne and his son came up together at this moment; and Gerald, not without strong emotions of pain mingled with pleasure, as he thought of his kind old benefactor, opened the gate of his own fair heritage to his father, sister, and friend.

No one spoke. The Admiral was thinking, with a sharp, involuntary pang of remorse, of his brother; Juliet and Gerald of their kind Uncle Richard. Alan Desborough's thoughts were far away, in one of the Eastern counties of England, where great cedar trees, in which nightingales built and sang, year after year, hung over an old moat and an antiquated dwelling-house. There, during his uncle's absence, he had lived as child and boy with his parents, who died confidently regarding the place as the future heritage of their son. It was the only idea he had ever entertained of a settled home.

The White House, the trees in the orchard, each bearing its burden of rosy-cheeked apples, the green sward, and the lawn with its pretty newly-arranged flower-garden under the windows, were all basking

in the morning sunshine. Uncle Richard's horses came to the paling at sight of Juliet; and the sweet summer fragrance filled the air as Admiral Chamerowne, his son and daughter, with Alan Desborough, walked up the winding road under the fruit-trees. Green shades were lowered over the open windows, a light breeze stirred the boughs of the old trees in the paddock at the back of the house. A beautiful green paroquet was swinging in its cage under the porch, but no living mortal was visible.

The Admiral rang the bell, which was quickly answered, and the party were shown into one of the pleasant sitting-rooms which opened upon the lawn. The tables were strewn with work-books and drawings; not untidily, but in token of pleasant cheerful occupations, only for the moment abandoned. Gerald felt it to be an unspeakable relief that a few minutes were thus afforded him for making fresh acquaintance with the residence of his bachelor uncle—his own future home.

He could not help owning that in neither aspect could he see The White House to more advantage than at present, with its abundant tokens of womanly care and taste. Vases of freshly-gathered, sweet-scented, deftly-arranged flowers were set about the room, and the wind blew over them freely from the

open windows. The young man felt little inclination to disturb the gentle, ladylike occupant of the place, in whom, from his father and sister's description, he already felt interested. Very possibly the hardy adventurer would soon weary of English country-life, and go with his friend to other and more stirring scenes.

Gerald Champernowne was standing at the window with his friend, looking out into the garden, when the sisters entered the room. He heard the Admiral's courteous greeting, and the sweet low voices replying to him, but an involuntary reluctance still made him stand apart. Mrs. Chichester and Elena Bianchi were dressed in white, exactly alike. After their reunion each had laid aside her mourning. Alan Desborough thought he had never beheld two more lovely women.

Juliet greeted her friends enthusiastically. It was the first time she had been separated for four and twenty hours from the Signorina since she came to reside at Sunset. Gerald felt that a longer delay would seem uncourteous, and, slowly turning round, drew nearer to solicit an introduction to the two fair women; who, it was easy for him to perceive, had exercised such beneficial influence over his father and his lonely sister.

The deeply-bronzed complexion, flushed by southern suns, paled, the manly form actually trembled, as Gerald Champernowne's eyes encountered those of the sisters. He stood silently contemplating them both, wrapped in wonder. The Signorina and Mrs. Chichester looked equally startled and embarrassed.

The Admiral broke in impatiently : "Come, come, you must not meet like strangers. Gerald, these ladies are your sister's best friends, and mine," he added warmly, "if the friendship of a choleric old invalid is worth their acceptance. What on earth is the matter ?"

Gerald had partially recovered himself. "You are right, father," he said slowly and with emphasis ; "I cannot meet these ladies as strangers. They seem to me like newly-recovered, long-lost friends."

"That's right, my boy, always remember that Juliet and I are under the very deepest obligations to the Signorina Bianchi."

Gerald shook hands, but, by some strange mistake, he exchanged this more friendly greeting, not with the Signorina but with Mrs. Chichester, who blushed deeply.

"No, that is not our Signorina," said the old officer, taking in his own the tiny trembling hand of the fair woman nearest to him and laying it in his son's.

"That is your tenant, Mrs. Chichester. To be sure you are her debtor for making this forlorn place habitable. I never saw such a transformation."

Admiral Champernowne, perhaps thinking that Gerald would be more at his ease in his absence, walked to the window, where Alan Desborough was still standing, and called his daughter. They all three stepped out among the flowers.

Mr. Champernowne seemed greatly at a loss how to improve the acquaintance with the two ladies. He looked from one to the other with amazement, noticing every feature. The strong resemblance—the not less striking difference between the sisters—their increasing agitation; not one trait was lost upon him. Mrs. Chichester was the first to speak, in a low tone quite inaudible to the group outside the window.

"I see that you recognise us. I entreat you to respect my secret."

Gerald bowed profoundly. He seemed quite unable to answer her. It was a relief to all parties when at that moment the Admiral called out his son to admire little Violet, whom the nurse was carrying across the lawn.

The child was a great favourite with him, though the year-old baby was too young to be an object of

interest to most gentlemen. Gerald, still in almost overwhelming surprise and embarrassment, was glad to turn his attention even to an infant; but this resource failed him. He glanced at the fair face, the grey, soft eyes, with their long sweeping lashes veiling the child's cheek, and turned abruptly away.

Mrs. Chichester and her sister came out on the lawn together. The child put out its arms to the Signorina, but, for the first time since Violet's birth, her aunt did not respond to the invitation. The colour mounted to her cheeks, as Gerald Champernowne turned and looked steadily at her, and she made way for her sister. Mrs. Chichester, however, remained talking to the Admiral somewhat absently, striving ineffectually to recover from her surprise and agitation.

Admiral Champernowne could not but see that something had gone wrong with the persons he had left in the drawing-room. He looked from one to the other without finding any clue to the mystery. Alan Desborough had not noticed Gerald's haughty discomfiture. He was talking to Juliet among the flowers.

After a few moments Gerald recovered his temper. He told Mrs. Chichester, with grave courtesy, that it was not at all likely he should wish to disturb her

in her occupation of The White House. At present his movements were quite uncertain, but most probably he should not remain beyond the next few months in England, and he should have to pass much of his time in London.

The Admiral listened in dismay. On their road he had consulted his son on all sorts of plans for the autumn and winter which they were to spend together, and the young man had not said a word about going away. He began to think foreign travelling did not improve people as much as he had fancied the previous evening was the case. Juliet was vexed when her father repeated to her what her brother had said.

"Oh, Gerald, you are not thinking of leaving us again! You will stay through the winter at Sunset?" she said imploringly. "Remember how long you have been away."

"We will talk over my plans presently," said Gerald. "I have no fixed arrangements as yet. At all events I am not likely to reside at The White House. That is all that is of consequence to your friend. When I do intend to become a householder, Mrs. Chichester shall have due notice."

He took up his cap, and, inviting Alan to walk

across the heath, bade a somewhat unceremonious adieu to the two ladies. The Admiral and Juliet stayed to prevail upon Mrs. Chichester to come and dine at the Hall, but the sisters were obdurate. There was no chance of a musical evening, since Mrs. Chichester declared that she had lost her voice, and Elena petitioned to be allowed to remain at The White House to cheer her.

Admiral Champernowne looked from one lovely face to the other. "I never saw either of you looking better," he said, provoked by their resistance. "That awkward son of mine has contrived to offend you. Well, I hope it will come right in time, but I do not understand the reason of my being deprived of your society and my favourite songs. I shall not let you off after this evening."

He stayed some time with Juliet after the young men's departure, sitting out on the lawn talking to the sisters, and wondering that any man, especially his son, could be such a dolt as not to admire and like them. It was not such a pleasant walk home, either for him or his daughter, as the one in the morning, when the lane was in shadow. Now the upward road was hot and dusty, with the sun right overhead. The Admiral, cross and weary, leans heavily on the girl's arm; or stood resting at each

gate into the lane, striking off savagely, with the end of his walking-stick, the gleaming heads of the scarlet poppies growing at the edge of the standing corn.





CHAPTER X.

Is it only the chime of the heather-bells,
That solemnly, sweetly, in chorus swells,
With the louder rush of the wind on high
Through the dark fir branches that sweep the sky ?

Was it merely the breezes rustling through
The russet fern-fronds all changed of hue,
Creeping o'er the dry stems of the hoary moss,
Whirling withered leaves our wild paths across ?

R. M. K.

WHATEVER discovery Gerald Champernowne might have made respecting his tenant at The White House was not communicated to his friend. He and Alan Desborough talked as men talk who are fond of hunting, shooting, and all kinds of active pursuits; walked as men walk, not loitering sentimentally by the way, but getting over the ground quickly; smoked their short pipes and came back, hot and dusty, just in time to dress for dinner.

Beyond passing admiration, Alan Desborough had

not bestowed a thought upon the beautiful sisters. He had not even been introduced to them, for at first Gerald had been the hero of the day ; and the Admiral, proud of his son, and anxious that his favourite neighbour should like him, had forgotten to bring forward by name his stranger guest. Gerald's discomposure and hurried departure had prevented the slight omission being rectified.

Another train of ideas was growing up in young Desborough's mind—another specimen of womanly beauty had captivated his fancy and excited his warmest admiration. Chilled by the disappointment of his early expectations of fortune, occupied by projects of foreign travel, an ardent sportsman, Alan Desborough had never been seriously in love. The moment in which his careless glances, wandering over the heath, met the vivid ray, shot through long lashes, from the black eyes of Juliet Champernowne, was fatal to his tranquillity. That strong first love which springs up in a moment, born of a look, of a tone of voice, which makes it a heaven of rapture to stand together watching the red sunset, to wander in a shadowy lane, to mingle voices in singing, was beginning to exert its influence over the dark-eyed sister and the friend of Gerald Champernowne.

Nothing could be more natural than the suggestion

contained in a little, delicate, lilac-tinted note, which was delivered to the Admiral after dinner, that, on her brother's return, Juliet would expect a respite from lessons, and that, consequently, the services of her governess might be dispensed with for a few days. If this was his opinion, as well as her own, the Signorina would esteem it a favour to be allowed to leave Sunset for a week or a fortnight. Mrs. Chichester found the heat in the valley oppressive, and would be glad to take advantage of her sister's companionship to visit with her some relatives at a distance.

Admiral Champernowne turned the note over and over, and finally pushed it towards his son.

"Read that, Gerald. What have you done to these ladies? I cannot understand in the least what she means. I do not believe that pretty woman has anything in the world the matter with her. Probably she fancies herself in your way at The White House."

Gerald read the letter through twice deliberately before returning it to his father.

"I will walk down presently, and set it all right," he said. "Depend upon it, father, if I can help it, you and my sister shall not lose your pleasant neighbour."

The Admiral's countenance brightened up.

"That's right, Gerald ; there is nothing like a personal interview for clearing up misunderstandings. For my part, I hate notes, and I think the man who invented written characters was a doubtful benefactor to his species. Of course the Signorina can have a holiday if she likes. It is the first she has asked for on her own account ; but I wish she and Mrs. Chichester would spend it at Sunset. That would be a better change than Newmarket, the dustiest place in England. They are too handsome to go to such a town, and what its attractions are for ladies I cannot imagine. That connection, whatever it may be, is the only thing I do not like about Mrs. Chichester."

Gerald did not reply, and the conversation turned into quite another channel. When Juliet left the dining-room her father told her he should expect her to sing to him ; and Alan Desborough, perhaps thinking his assistance desirable in the selection of music, speedily followed her. While the Admiral took his short siesta, Gerald set out on his walk.

The soft summer sunset was reddening the moor, and the young man stopped for a moment to look at the Tors, before descending the hill, and turning his back on the glowing west. Perhaps the contrast

saddened him, for Gerald Champernowne's countenance looked grave, even stern, as he walked slowly along the lane. He remembered a great danger, a fearful temptation, which he had escaped, and he felt that in the interview he was seeking he was about to encounter both again.

His step became slower and slower, his dark complexion flushed, as he revolved over and over again doubts which sorely troubled him. Even when he laid his hand on the gate of what was now his own domain, he felt inclined to turn back; but he caught a glimpse of a white dress under the trees of the orchard, and he went forward to meet his fate.

The plantation at the back of the house threw a deep shadow over the lawn, and the glowing sunset was entirely shut out. Cool and pleasant in the sultry August evening, The White House was less cheerful than the sunlit mansion on the hill. Gerald closed the gate softly, and walked under the laden boughs, over the ground which as yet he scarcely regarded as his own.

At a little distance from the house, under a drooping canopy of boughs, Elena Bianchi was sitting, quite alone, and with no semblance of occupation. Her eyes were fixed dreamily on the cool, clear

evening sky, where the stars were coming out by myriads.

Gerald Champernowne stepped off the gravel, and approached her noiselessly across the greensward. His heart beat violently, he almost fancied she must hear its hurried pulsations; but she was wrapped in thought, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, but the evening star overhead—perhaps even scarcely conscious that it was shining down on her bright, uncovered tresses.

Again he paused, at a loss how to address her. Some thoughts he had entertained died out of his mind when he came upon her thus suddenly, alone, looking so pure, so holy, in the twilight. He scarcely liked to disturb her serenity, by alluding to the doubts which had sullied his recollection of her fair image. A vision of a fair, pale face resting on his shoulder. The sweep of those light, long tresses, wet with sea spray, across his brow, blinding, bewildering him, the desperate struggle for life, and to save her, passed through his memory. Once more they were alone upon the waste of waters, with no hope save in God's providence; and yet another train of reflections came surging up against his will, overpowering softer considerations, and he stepped forward, grave and pale, to accost her.

Elena Bianchi started violently when the young man came round the stem of the old walnut-tree, and stood silently but respectfully in front of her.

This time there was no formal salutation; Gerald could not find words to speak; his voice was choked with passionate emotion, and the fair, pale woman trembled beneath his gaze.

"Why did your sister call it *her* secret?" he said, at length. "It is *you* who are hiding from your lawful protector. What is the meaning of this subterfuge? Am I justified in not revealing the truth to my father and Juliet?"

The Signorina blushed deeply under his stern gaze, but she seemed less overwhelmed with confusion than he expected.

"Yes," she said simply. "For the present we must humour my sister. Be not afraid," she added, smiling. "Giulietta will learn no evil from me. Will you not trust her to my care?"

Gerald looked at her wonderingly. "Willingly," he said, "if I understand you myself, not otherwise. How is it possible that I can trust an enigma—unless," he added more softly, "you grant me a solution."

Elena looked round timidly, but they were quite

alone. Mrs. Chichester was lying down in her own room on the farther side of the house.

"No one is near us," said Gerald anxiously, sitting down on the bench beside her. "Trust me, then there can be no betrayal of secrets. Give me a name to call you by; that of Bianchi I do not recognise. Are you aware that my companion this morning was Sir John Desborough's nephew? He little thought how much injury those soft, fatal eyes had done him. And yet I cannot believe it! Are you really Lady Desborough? Is that grey-eyed, fair-haired babe *your child?*"

"No," said the girl, laughing and blushing, while she drew back half angrily the hand he had taken. "That part of the mystery is easily solved. I am not married. My sister, little Violet's mother, is Sir John Desborough's wife. When we first went on board the Indianman, the Captain, seeing me so ill, and my sister attending on me, imagined I was Lady Desborough. Laura would never clear up the mistake, and allowed you and others to call her Miss Forester. I, you know, before the dreadful shipwreck, never left my cabin."

"You should have undeceived me, Madonna," said the young man bending over her. "Had I no claim upon you? But we will not speak of that

at present. I suppose I must try to forgive you. What a mad frolic this is! Why does not your sister assume her own name and station? Above all, why are you to suffer from her eccentricities? How long is this farce to be kept up?"

"Indeed I am quite of your opinion," said the Signorina, sighing. "When I believed that I had lost her, when I thought myself alone, poor, friendless, I did not like to throw myself upon the charity of the Desboroughs. Under my mother's maiden name I answered your father's advertisement, and I have been—oh! so happy, with him and Juliet. But with Laura it is different. She is not a free agent. When I found that she was living, though rejoicing in her safety, I was miserable at the deception I found she persisted in practising."

Gerald listened somewhat absently. "It is of yourself that I wish to hear," he said abruptly. "Why did you allow me to remain in the belief that the woman I saved from shipwreck was the wife of another?"

Elena's soft eyes filled with tears. "I never thought about it at all, until just as we were parting you called me Lady Desborough, and then my poor sister's name brought back such sad feelings, which I knew might be in your heart too, that I could not

undeceive you—could not inflict upon you more bitter pain. I remembered her bright laughing face, when she told me of the error into which her gay companions had fallen. Nothing seemed of any consequence now that I had lost her. All I thought of at the moment was that it would be cruel to raise false hopes, when she had perished in all her grace and beauty; and I alone, for whom no one would ever care to inquire, was left. I was too ill and weak to do more than ask you to mention to no one —least of all to the Desboroughs, who never loved me—your impression, that one nearly allied to them had survived the wreck.”

“ Yes, and I have obeyed you scrupulously, though with some doubts whether I was acting rightly,” said Gerald. “ Even to Alan, my friend, with whom I shared every other thought and feeling, I never mentioned your name; your wish has been kept sacred. But when I heard from him that Lady Desborough was still supposed to have perished, that his uncle mourned her as dead, I felt that I could keep silent no longer; and I returned to England at once, to prosecute a search which I did not dream would terminate here. I shall never forget my amazement when I recognised, first your sister, then yourself, in the occupants of The White

House. Did not you pity my helpless confusion?"

"Indeed I was not less perplexed," said the Signorina. "Neither my sister nor I knew what to say at the moment; nor have I been able, as yet, to persuade her to lay aside her disguise and resume her proper position. I am certain that she loves her husband, and, although Sir John Desborough has not been as kind to me as she expected—as he might have been—I respect his character, and have no doubt of his affection for his wife. In time they will be reconciled, but Laura must not be driven to take steps of which hereafter she might repent. If she returns to him of her own free will, at her own time, and in her own way, they may yet be happy; but argument is thrown away upon her, and I dare not incur the risk of precipitating their reunion."

"Well, it is no affair of mine," said Gerald; "you, of course, understand your sister's character better than I can do. I am more anxious about yourself. Why did you not keep your promise of writing to tell me of your safe arrival in England? Surely I had a right to feel some anxiety about my companion in such deadly peril! Did you think that I, like the Desboroughs, would never care to inquire after you?"

Elena looked timidly up at him. "Did you think of me after that dreadful time? It seemed to me that all recollection of me must arouse too painful a remembrance to be willingly cherished. My own mind, after the loss of my sister, was almost a blank. I scarcely remembered what you had said to me, but I never forgot my kind preserver. Giulietta will tell you how constantly, how gratefully I spoke of you to her, little imagining her to be your sister!"

"I would rather *you* told me your thoughts of me in absence," said Gerald tenderly. "Mine are easily recorded. I have thought, since the hazard we shared together, of little else but yourself. I have dwelt upon the few agitated sentences which you uttered when I walked down the quay, and saw you carried away from me on board the vessel which was to convey you to England, until those whispered words bore almost any significance, except what you, perhaps, wished me to attach to them. I saw that you were miserable, and I longed to comfort you. What might be the reasons which made you wish to conceal yourself from your husband I could not guess, but some instinct prevented my blaming you. I am not sure that I can honestly say that I wished to see you reunited to one who must, I suspected, be unworthy of you; but I would have made any sacri-

fice to secure your happiness. I did not even know that you still lived after all you had gone through, but I failed in realising the idea that we should never meet again; and I could not believe you to have acted wrongly—unfaithfully as a wife and mother, as I consider your sister to have done. Elena, you cannot deny that I was right in all these impressions and instincts, vague and indefinite as you left them. You could not—you would not have shown yourself as regardless of your husband's feelings as your sister has been. This is, on my part, a frank and full confession. Will you not be equally candid with me?"

"Yes, if you will help me to re-awaken Laura to a proper sense of her own dignity and duties towards her husband and children," said Elena beseechingly. "Half her angry feelings about Sir John Desborough are on my account. I cannot blame her as perhaps I ought. She is a most devoted mother, and almost wrought a miracle of love and faith, under Providence, in restoring her little son's power to speak. She has been twice to see him at Desborough House. Her two eldest children, born in India, were taken from her, and, rightly or wrongly, she attributed their death to the want of motherly love and watchfulness. She was little more than a child when she married

a husband many years older than herself, whose time and thoughts were too much occupied with important public duties to allow him to study his young wife's character. He never cherished her as he should have done, either in joy or sorrow, as perhaps some day he will do if she is ever restored to him. He did love her ardently, and no doubt acted as he thought for the best; but he was jealous even of his own children, still more of her relatives—most of all of myself, her only sister, and I have never interfered between them. Nothing would induce me now to share her married home, but I would give years of a life, which hitherto has not been a happy one, and of which by far the pleasantest portion has been the tranquil period spent under your father's roof, to see my sister restored to her proper place in her husband's home and heart. Since little Violet's birth she has been much more sedate and tranquil. The terrors of the shipwreck and of my supposed death deeply affected her, and lowered her high spirits; but I fear have not disposed her to take a more favourable and loving view of her husband's conduct."

"Has it ever entered into her calculations that, believing her to be dead, Sir John Desborough might marry again? might give this idolised boy a step-mother," said Gerald abruptly. "Alan is expecting

daily to hear of a fresh matrimonial connection on the part of his uncle."

"No, she is persuaded of his constancy," said the Signorina. "But I do not defend or agree with her in opinion. She is very impetuous. Her husband never understood how to manage her. A child might lead her by affection, but it is out of the power of man or woman to control her."

She rose from her seat under the walnut tree, and held out her hand. "Good-night," she said. "Have you forgiven—will you trust me?"

"Yes, if you will come back to Sunset to-morrow," said Gerald, clasping the soft tremulous fingers; "the old man is wearying after you; Juliet is distracted with grief. Promise me that you will return. On that condition I will, for the present, respect Mrs. Chichester's wishes."

The fair woman stood in the clear twilight, with her graceful robes resting on the grass, her hand in his, considering the proposition. Then taking leave of him by drawing back her hand, after an almost imperceptible pressure, she said :

"Be it as you wish. Addio! A rivederci." Without waiting for an answer she glided gently away between the trees of the orchard, and entered the house.

Gerald's homeward walk this time was much pleasanter than his sister's had been in the afternoon. His mind was relieved from an almost overpowering weight of anxiety; and he did not feel disposed to scan the future closely enough to see what it might have in store for him.

He walked back slowly; smoking his cigar, while he thought over the Signorina's words, and all that had occurred previous to his recognition of herself and her sister that morning. When he came in sight of the Hall, Gerald heard the united tones of his friend and sister through the open windows. The Admiral, in the warm summer night, was walking up and down under the colonnade; where his son joined him, and gladdened his heart by informing him of the entirely satisfactory result of his embassy; assuring him that the Signorina and her sister had given up their proposed excursion to the Eastern Counties, and that Miss Bianchi intended to return home on the morrow.





CHAPTER XI.

Voices seem whispering among the trees,
As their branches toss in the evening breeze ;
Over the heath comes a murmuring thrill,
Wings folding, unfolding—now all is still.

R. M. K.

ADMIRAL CHAMPERNOWNE had altered the name of his family mansion when he built the new music-room facing the west. His foreign wife complained of the want of light and air in the old English country house, and said that she could not sing in apartments crowded with antiquated furniture. He took her back to Italy for the winter; and on their return, the beautiful proportions of the saloon, which was still sacred to her memory, gave her unlimited satisfaction. He could still hear, in fancy, the marvellous strains of her voice floating on the air; or see her standing at the open window, as he passed to and fro, with the sunshine reflected in her lustrous eyes.

Juliet, on the contrary, with girlish perversity, loved better the low-ceilinged rooms at the back of the house. Their architecture was certainly more picturesque, and quite out of character with the supplemental modern frontage. Abutments and recesses, totally inexplicable on any scientific principle, and wholly irregular, were mantled over with luxuriant creepers on the outside, and within afforded space for convenient cupboards, even in one instance giving good ground for the tradition that a place of concealment, called the Priest's Hole, had been walled in after the troubles of the Civil Wars were over. The morning sun glinted cheerily upon the diamond-paned casements of the schoolroom, and found its way with some difficulty through intricate wreaths of jasmine and honeysuckle, in at the windows of the old nursery which the girl still occupied.

It was very natural that Gerald Champernowne should often find his way to his sister's nominal schoolroom; but as the Admiral had sanctioned a general holiday, provided it was passed at Sunset, instead of in the Eastern Counties, there were no prescribed tasks. The usually strict rules of the establishment were relaxed in favour of the present visitors; and, provided the household was ready for dinner at the retarded hour, all were left at liberty.

The young men often persuaded the Signorina and Juliet to accompany them in their rambles over the moor. It was a treat to be allowed to turn their steps in that direction in the cool early morning,—Gerald and Alan carrying wallets stored with light refreshments,—and not to return till the western heavens were flooded with glorious light. The tenant of The White House was not neglected ; at all hours and seasons messages were transmitted ; and, in the Admiral's opinion more especially, the family party was not esteemed complete without her. Though Gerald, like the Signorina, blamed Mrs. Chichester's conduct, he had respected her desire for secrecy. Perhaps this sympathy in opinion led to a greater intimacy between him and his sister's instructress and companion ; since nothing is more conducive to harmony than a subject in common which involves a slight amount of fault-finding. The Signorina and Gerald were not harsh censors ; but they certainly found a good deal to say to each other respecting the circumstances, known only to themselves, which had led to their being inmates of the Admiral's mansion.

It seemed strange to recall the moments of danger shared together, when the great ship they had just left was engulfed before their eyes, and their frail

bark, rocked on the mountainous waves, still held on her way. The agonising suspense while waiting to see whether the signal hoisted would be observed by a passing vessel, the maddening cheer when her slackening sails showed that the ship waited for them, the delirious excitement when exhausted nature proved barely able to second the brave swimmer's utmost efforts to save the object of such long-sustained anxiety; and then the rest, the gradual recovery from that fearful tension of brain and sinew and nerve—the tranquil homeward voyage over dancing, sparkling waters.

And now to look together over the purple moorland prospect, familiar to Gerald's eyes in boyhood, and present to his imagination when death was imminent! To find that the insurmountable barrier which he had recognised then as existing between himself and his companion in danger, was a fiction invented in sport by another, and that the gentle being he had rescued from death was free to choose, free to love; and, moreover, an object of the tenderest respect and affection to his father and sister, made these summer rambles very pleasant to Gerald Charnowne. The little hand which trembled as he assisted Elena in crossing the wet places in the bog, had clung to his in moments of agony; the sweet

face on which blushes stole beneath his tender gaze, had been blanched by terror, as it lay pillow'd on his beating heart, amid the wild roar of the deafening storm. Could either of them ever forget the perils through which they had passed together?

Alan Desborough was quite ready to profit by his friend's absorption in his present happy reflections, and to become Juliet's protector during these morning and evening walks. If the subjects of their conversation were less exciting, and their friendship less intimate, they still found abundant sources of mutual interest. The curious varieties of heaths, and reeds, and mosses, the cotton plant waving over some quaking morass its feathery flakes and puff-balls, had to be gathered, to enrich the girl's collection; and many a tale, which to her was full of interest and novelty, was told by the traveller, of Indian jungles, or of the white blossoms of the "edelweis," gathered by the hardiest climbers from the crevices of the glaciers and the blue forget-me-not-like *cynoglossum* of the Alps, flowering under the snow.

Sometimes these younger truants, beguiled by a tempting pursuit of bird or butterfly, would lose the slight track across the moor; but, whichever way the excursionists wandered, they still managed to keep together, or reunite, before the great bell at the Hall

summoned them indoors to perform their toilette in readiness for the Admiral's courteously postponed, but inevitably and inexorably punctual, dinner-hour.

Mrs. Chichester usually joined the party then, or later in the evening. The Admiral's musical treat was not perfect without her; she was very fond of her kind neighbour, and loved to oblige him. Even he could not but perceive that the indisposition, which she had alleged as a cause for desiring change of air, was not altogether fanciful. She was evidently not in good health, and her spirits were variable. Gerald Champernowne and Alan Desborough had not enlivened her by their arrival and society as much as had been the case with the Signorina and her pupil. She still spoke at times of leaving home and visiting her friends, but she did not make it a condition that her sister should accompany her. When alone she would wander from room to room, or in the garden at The White House, restlessly; as if conscious of the insecurity of her tenure, and unwilling to go forth from her sunny nook in the orchard, and seek for herself another home.

Gerald Champernowne and his sister were alone together in the schoolroom, the Signorina having gone down to spend the morning at The White House.

Juliet was at the height of human felicity: but perhaps her brother thought something was missing from the pleasant, old-fashioned apartment which he had expected to find there. Nevertheless he listened kindly to his sister's girlish chronicles, and looked over her collections of curiosities; telling her incidents of travel, and sporting adventures, which Juliet, in her turn, thought occasionally deficient in spirit, compared with some narratives to which she had listened on the moor.

"Those are the Signorina's treasures," she said, looking up suddenly from a search she was making among some portfolios in one corner; and perceiving that her brother was standing before one of the dark old cabinets on each side of the fireplace. "We must not disturb her books and papers. I never open those doors in her absence."

Gerald took no notice of his sister's injunction. He did not turn round or answer her.

Juliet came behind him, and laid her hand on one of the open doors of the cabinet.

"That is the message from the sea," she said gravely. "Did you know that the Signorina and Mrs. Chichester were on board the great passenger steam-ship, the 'Lord Clyde,' which was lost in the January snowstorm last year? Was it not curious

that the bottle in which the letter was enclosed should have been washed on shore here?"

The young man's countenance showed strong emotion. With all his manliness he scarcely succeeded in maintaining his composure. Visions of the dead and dying—of the fair-haired boy who had penned that letter at his dictation—of all who perished—of the few survivors, rose before him. The roar of waves, the dash of waters, were in his ears. He could feel the frail boat in which he and one other had been the only persons saved from perishing, rocking from side to side as he sprang into the sea. As these memories rushed through heart and brain the hand leaning against the shelf visibly trembled.

"Are you ill, Gerald? Is anything the matter?" said Juliet, passing her arm round his waist. "Or, perhaps you, who have been in so many perils and dangers, realise even more than I do the dreadful sufferings of poor souls at sea. It was a fearful night on shore. I never went to bed. I sat up praying, and listening to the trees crashing down. More than a hundred fell. It was almost as terrible on land as on the water. The Signorina even now cannot bear to speak of it."

"No wonder," said Gerald in a hoarse, low tone. "Mrs. Chichester, who has a bolder spirit, was talking

to me about the shipwreck yesterday. It was a strange coincidence that the letter should have come ashore here, and that her sister—your dear little governess—should have forwarded it to Desborough House."

He stopped abruptly. "There was one brave fellow, a steerage passenger, who saved the Signorina's life," said Juliet enthusiastically. "The boat in which he had placed her filled with water and sank, just as a ship crossed their course and hailed them. This man swam with her in his arms to the vessel; which took them on board, and landed them on the coast of Spain. He might not be exactly a gentleman, but he was certainly a hero!"

"Is that your opinion, little one, or the Signorina's?" said Gerald, kissing her blushing cheek affectionately; but adding with a little bitterness, "I believe in the very jaws of death or starvation, women think of caste and precedence."

"Oh no! The Signorina worships that brave man," said Juliet. "She prays for him nightly, and would give worlds to see him again. George Campion!" the girl added thoughtfully—"those are your initials. Oh, Gerald! when I was watching the snow drifting on the moor that night, while thunder crashed over the woods, I thought that you

might be at sea in the tempest. We had no tidings to guide us. Why did you never write to me?"

"Because I thought that even my little sister and Uncle Richard had forgotten me," replied her brother bitterly. "At that time I believed myself to be without a friend on earth. But we will not go back to the dreary period of banishment. What a change the Signorina has wrought here! We can hardly be sufficiently grateful to her. Let us go down to The White House, and persuade her and Mrs. Chichester to walk with us."

"First I must put these shelves in order," said Juliet, methodically replacing the articles Gerald had so unceremoniously disarranged. "The Signorina is so neat. She would detect the smallest disturbance, and she always looks into this cabinet before going to bed. I believe she says a prayer in her heart for the poor creatures who perished at sea."

"And her preserver? I hope, though he had the misfortune to be only a steerage passenger, she does not omit his name," said Gerald lightly, as he locked the door of the cabinet; after his sister had put its contents in order, before running to fetch her hat that she might accompany him.

Alan Desborough joined the brother and sister as

they were passing through the hall. He had been writing letters all the morning.

"So provoking!" he said, with an accent of strong vexation. "Just when the Admiral had so kindly asked me to prolong my visit. Gerald, my furlough is cut short. I must leave you early to-morrow."

The girl's heart gave a throb and stood still.

"Nonsense, old fellow! we can't spare you!" said Gerald, drawing his sister's hand through his arm. "What a little simpleton you are, Juliet! I believe you are thinking about the shipwreck we were talking about still. What makes you tremble? Are you not safe with us?"

Alan Desborough's quick glance met the shrinking, quickly-withdrawn, tremulous radiance of those Italian eyes. He came round to the other side of Juliet.

"Miss Champernowne, will you not pity me? Because I have the misfortune to be cousin and god-father to a child whom I have never seen, I am actually sent for to nurse him through an attack of croup or diphtheria, which his attendants consider alarming. For this agreeable responsibility I am called upon to relinquish all the pleasures I have lately been enjoying."

"Is it Sir John Desborough's son who is ill?" said

Gerald, stopping short. "When did you hear of it?"

"Only this morning," said his friend. "Of course I am very sorry, but I really wish these good women had not thought proper to send for me."

"Juliet, it is of no use your attempting to walk with us to-day, you are not looking well," said her brother. "Besides, I want to talk over this obstinate fellow. I will call at The White House presently, when Alan and I have had a brisk walk, and dispelled his dream about leaving us."

Juliet looked bitterly disappointed. Alan took her part vehemently. "Why may not your sister go with us? The air on the moor will cure her headache, if she has one; but I confess I see no signs of indisposition. You have been frightening her by some tale of terror. Let us go straight across towards the Tors."

"Well, have your own way," said Gerald, turning his back on the lanes, and leading the way across the moor. "We will not go farther than you like, Juliet, and when we have brought you home Alan can add a postscript to his letter, and send a prescription for cough-drops to the nurses at Desborough Park; whilst I go down to The White House to fetch the Signorina and Mrs. Chichester to

dinner. Mind you lie down to rest, child, after you come in."

Juliet promised obedience. The warm flush upon her cheek, if somewhat feverish, betokened pleasure at being allowed to accompany her brother and his friend upon their ramble. Gerald's persuasions, however, proved unavailing. Alan, in his uncle's absence from England, felt it to be his duty to comply with the summons he had received to visit the sick boy at Desborough House. The child was the idol of its only surviving parent; and if its present illness should unfortunately prove fatal, Sir John would never forgive his nephew for having neglected to attend to the pressing appeal for his presence, sent by the timid lady in whose charge his young cousin was placed. Juliet admired the firmness Alan displayed, even while she regretted the necessity for his departure. She was very silent during their walk, which did not extend far. Her beautiful eyes cast down, and veiled by their long lashes, scarcely took in a feature of the scenery.

Alan Desborough watched her closely. He did not try to draw her into conversation, but at the slightest check in their progress, or anticipated difficulty, his place was at her side, his hand extended to assist her; and he did not say aloud, as her

brother had done, that the slender fingers yielded to his clasp trembled perceptibly.

He explained to her more clearly than he had done before, his connection with the little child whose life hung on a thread ; but a warning glance from Gerald stopped him just as he was on the point of mentioning that the little boy's mother, the beautiful Lady Desborough, had been one of the ill-fated passengers on board the "Lord Clyde."

It was the first time he had mentioned his uncle's wife ; excepting the slight reference he had made on the first morning after his arrival at Sunset, to the destruction of his own hopes of fortune. He now ascribed his friend's cautioning look to Juliet's nervousness on their first starting ; and concluded that some painful reminiscence was attached in the Admiral's family, to shipwrecks and storms at sea. No allusion was ever made before the Signorina and her sister, by the Admiral or his daughter, to the great snowstorm ; as the subject naturally affected them deeply. Alan Desborough was not aware that they were among the few persons saved from the wreck of the Indiaman.

Gerald's thoughts were too much preoccupied to allow him to be a close observer, or he might have noticed that his sister was not quite at her ease ; and

that his friend was more than usually attentive to her. All the way over the moor he was revolving in his mind how he was to break to the mother the tidings of her child's danger.

When they reached the gate leading into the plantations on their return, her brother gave Juliet into the charge of young Desborough : and set off, across fields and by-lanes, in the direction of the house in the valley. Juliet, at the last, would have given the world to detain him ; but the moment he had stated his intention he was gone. For some time he had not attended to a word that had been said, but had walked silently along ; determined to leave his companions as soon as they reached the boundary of his father's domain.

Underneath the great laurels which had grown up in shadow for centuries, knotted and gnarled, lay dark, silent pools, motionless in the sultry heat. White water-lilies were tangled with coarser weeds, and a shy, graceful swan glided away into yet deeper recesses of verdure, as Juliet and her companion walked slowly along the mossy path, close to the water's edge.

The young girl, in her embarrassment, could not think of a word by which to break the silence, which she nevertheless felt to be dangerous. They were

passing a damp, ivy-covered hermitage, where the path was led by a foot-bridge over the running brook which fed the ponds ; the water dropping from ledge to ledge formed a cascade. Alan stopped to look at the cool, green picture.

"I shall not see anything like this where I am going. Tell me, Miss Champernowne, whether I may come back to Sunset ? *You* have not seconded your brother and your father's invitation."

Juliet strove to answer him with calm propriety, but her voice was low and unsteady, and her foot slipped on the mossy plank of the rustic bridge. Alan's hand was stretched out, and the trembling fingers were drawn within his arm before she spoke.

"When the little boy is better you must return here. Gerald will miss you sadly."

"That is not sufficient," said Alan. "Gerald is as yet almost a stranger in his father's house. I cannot come back only to minister to his amusement. I must have a warmer welcome."

Juliet was silent.

"Next month your brother will have other friends round him," Alan continued. "The shooting will commence. Even now he is often preoccupied. Miss Champernowne, you must give me a little

more encouragement; if I am ever to repeat my visit. It might be unwelcome to yourself or the **Admiral.**"

He tried to see her downcast face, but unsuccessfully. Alan Desborough chose to believe that the timid voice which at last answered him was human; though it was more like a breeze rustling in the foliage, or the note of a bird in the thicket, seeming to say "Come back!"—than spoken words. Without repeating his question, he told her of his present plans and prospects; which he said had assumed a much more definite shape since he had seen how easy Gerald found it to relinquish his adventurous schemes and become a domestic character. His own career would perforce be a different one, but he had resolved not to remain idle. An appointment, no doubt, might be procured for him, through his uncle's interest in India. He had written to Sir John, offering to join him, as he had often suggested; and only wished that there might some day be found in the world a woman whom he could love, brave enough to share his fate and share his fortunes in a less crowded quarter of the globe than Europe. What would she think of such a prospect? Could she endure to leave friends and country for the sake of one who loved her.

Juliet tried to draw away her hand, but it was held too firmly for resistance.

"Do not ask me," she said faintly. "How can I tell what women feel? Papa says I am only a child."

Alan Desborough smiled.

"Juliet, it is your opinion I ask—your fiat which must guide me. Could you bear to leave England with me, when circumstances entitle me to ask it, if your father permitted me to be your husband?"

He drew her down beside him on a bench beside the running stream, on whose brink, having passed the deep ponds, they had lately been walking; and at last succeeded in seeing the dark eyes with no other veil than their long lashes. Apparently, though downcast, their expression was satisfactory. Juliet was so much agitated that he did not press her to answer him farther than by that timid silence. He led her through the shrubbery tenderly, with the deepest respect; parting from her at the side door leading into the old part of the house, under the jasmine-covered porch.

Gerald came home alone, just in time for dinner, tired and out of spirits. Mrs. Chichester, he said, was ill, and much disturbed by the tidings he had conveyed to her of Hugh Desborough's dangerous

illness. The little boy was an object of the tenderest interest to her; as she had become well acquainted with him while staying with friends near Newmarket soon after losing her own child, at the same age, and in consequence of similar infirmity of health.

In the hope that her advice would be of service to Mrs. Vernon and the little boy, the bereaved mother had determined to start at once to see him. The Signorina was unwilling to leave her sister, whom she was assisting to make a few necessary preparations. Mrs. Chichester would be grateful for the protection of Mr. Desborough; and would be ready to set out the next morning, in time to meet the earliest train, and to perform the journey with the utmost rapidity.

Admiral Champernowne passed a dull evening without music; inveighing against the Eastern Counties, children, nurses, doctors, and ladies indiscriminately. He had not been so much out of temper since the Signorina took up her abode in his family. His only comfort lay in the assurance that she was not going away.

Juliet broke down miserably in the duet she attempted to sing with Alan Desborough for the crusty old veteran's amusement; and was sent off to bed in dire disgrace, with strict injunctions not to get up to

breakfast at the early hour fixed for the benefit of the travellers. Gerald scolded her severely for not having obeyed his injunctions to lie down and rest for an hour before dinner; and the poor girl had not courage to mention that the half-hour bell was ringing when she entered the house. Perhaps silence was the best policy; for her brother would certainly have inquired why it took her so long to return home with Alan Desborough, the short way, past the ponds, through the shrubbery.





CHAPTER XII.

I heard a poet sing a lay, sweet words that made me weep,
But the mother's children's hour is when her darlings are asleep,
When she pauses by each narrow cot and says a voiceless prayer,
For the little restless creatures who are sleeping in her care.

R. M. K.

THE dust lay thick upon the leaves of the trees which hung over the high wall in front of Desborough House, and the August sun shone hotly down upon the pavement of Newmarket when Mrs. Chichester and Alan Desborough reached the termination of their long journey. With her womanly, compassionate instincts thoroughly roused in behalf of the lonely child, who had won her affections soon after her bereavement, the lady was on her way to nurse him.

Alan Desborough felt her presence to be a relief.

He had the greatest possible confidence in her power of aiding this afflicted household. Quite unaccustomed to illness, he had been at a loss to conceive of what use he could be, and yet his kindness of heart had prompted obedience to Mrs. Vernon's summons. It was an unspeakable comfort to bring with him that bright, energetic creature, full of sanguine hopes, and confident in her own manifold resources.

He had scarcely troubled himself to inquire into the nature of the deep interest taken by his travelling companion in the account of his little cousin's illness, but he felt certain that she understood the case thoroughly. The few symptoms touched upon in Mrs. Vernon's hurried letter, had been at once set down by Mrs. Chichester as less alarming than the timid writer conceived them to be. Children born in India were always delicate. Her own child, she said, had suffered in the same manner, frequently much more severely, before he was taken from her. After a pause of a few moments she added, in an altered voice :

“ Hugh Desborough is more than commonly sensitive to changes of season. For a child of his constitution the great heat of the summer, unaccompanied by Eastern modes of cooling the temperature, was more overpowering in England than in the Bungalows

among the hills. He ought not to have been kept in those close shrubberies, but taken to the sea-side."

Mrs. Vernon manifested great pleasure on receiving her unexpected guest, and at once admitted her to a sight of the little ailing boy. Rooms were prepared, as a matter of course, for the lady and for Mr. Desborough; and nothing whatever was said of Mrs. Chichester's taking up her abode with the friends in or near Newmarket, whom she had on other occasions professed herself anxious to visit.

It almost seemed as if the young, energetic woman was suddenly installed as mistress of Sir John Desborough's mansion. Alan felt himself to be only a visitor; but, in this house of sickness and anxiety, Mrs. Chichester seemed more at home than in the sunny abode in the orchard. Her quiet yet firm manner made all obey her; and she carried out such measures as she thought advisable for the treatment of the invalid, some of them quite contrary to English customs and prejudices, without difficulty or contradiction.

The medical men as well as the nurses had been compelled to own themselves at fault. No one understood the child's malady, except the young mother who had failed to keep her own little treasure with her, but now seemed likely to find her unwearied exertions availing to save this comparative stranger.

From the moment when the languid boy cast his arms round her neck, life seemed to re-awaken. His pulse became stronger, his appetite returned, when he saw the tempting viands prepared by her own hands. Day by day, though slowly, Hugh made some progress towards recovery; ascending with feeble steps the long, narrow valley over which the shadow of death seemed to have been cast so rapidly.

Mrs. Chichester never left the child by night or by day; and, from her abundant life and cheerfulness, Hugh Desborough seemed to inhale fresh vitality. The dangerous symptoms gradually disappeared, and once more the boy's gentle laugh was heard as he crept about the shadowy chambers.

Alan was not less grateful than the anxious woman whose despondent nature had lacked the loving faith necessary to work miracles. He was glad to be relieved from a responsibility which had weighed upon him painfully, and his affectionate nature rejoiced in the recovery of his little cousin. Such a blow would have been inflicted on Sir John Desborough by the knowledge of his son's danger, as in all probability would have left its mark for life. He had suffered so severely from the intelligence, tardily conveyed to him, of his son's having temporarily lost the power of speaking, that, notwithstanding the

relief afforded by more favourable accounts, he mentioned seriously in the last letters received from him, the probability of his resigning his appointment and returning to England.

Mrs. Vernon had written immediately to tell him that Hugh was much stronger and better; and that she ascribed the very favourable change in his state of health principally to the great care and kindness of a lady, lately returned from India, where she had lost her own child, who had taken a fancy to the little boy and understood the treatment of his malady. When again, quite recently, dangerous indications had reappeared, she had been unwilling prematurely to excite apprehension in the anxious mind of a parent at a distance. She felt now, and rejoiced in her caution, that Hugh's illness might be mentioned to his father as a danger happily over.

"Shall I offer you my escort back into Cornwall?" Alan Desborough said when he met Mrs. Chichester in the garden, where the nurses were wheeling about little Hugh in his chair. "I see no necessity for my remaining here longer, and I have a letter from Gerald Champernowne reminding me of my promise to return and shoot with him. Can I be of any service, or have you other visits to pay in this neighbourhood when my little cousin is well enough to spare you?"

Mrs. Chichester looked up from gathering some flowers for the child, with an air of great surprise. "I am not thinking of leaving him at present," she said; "Hugh would be as ill as he was before I came, if I were to desert my post. It is quite out of the question. I see that I must not lose sight of him."

"Indeed I believe you are right," said Alan; "but it seems hard to demand such a sacrifice from you. I, you see, am already satisfied with my very inferior share of duty"

"You?" said Mrs. Chichester, smiling. "What can *you* do? Of what use can a man be in a little boy's sick-room—in such a case as this? Unless it were a father—sometimes fathers are wonderfully patient, I believe; I do not know it from experience. I must own," she added in a harder tone, "the men I have seen tried in that way did not acquit themselves creditably. They were not miracles of patience, and they gave more trouble than the invalids. By all means go back and enjoy your shooting."

Alan Desborough felt somewhat hurt.

"I would stay if I could be of use," he said. "My attachment to my uncle is very sincere; and, with the exception of his little son, I am his nearest relative."

"Yes, I know it," said Mrs. Chichester. "If he had not married the young half-foreign lady, who treated him so heartlessly, and abandoned her maternal and conjugal duties, you would have been his heir. Was that what you were going to tell me?"

"Certainly not," said the young man proudly. "I know nothing of Lady Desborough; and, if misunderstandings existed between her and my uncle, as I fear may have been the case, I regret that she did not live long enough for them to be cleared up. As it is, I would rather not hear my uncle's young wife, Hugh's mother, blamed in my presence—especially as she is no longer living."

Mrs. Chichester frankly held out her hand. "Forgive me, Mr. Desborough; I think I have earned the right to blame the mother, who, for any caprice of temper, neglected to perform her duty towards that darling boy. Henceforth I look upon him as my own. I know that he will die if I leave him; and, with your consent, as Sir John Desborough's representative in England, I will give up every other plan and project, and remain with him for the present. This arrangement meets with Mrs. Vernon's entire approval; you can, if you like, consult with her on the subject before you give it your sanction."

Alan Desborough cordially shook hands with her. "Mrs. Vernon's wishes are mine," he said; "I have been dreading the consequences to little Hugh of a separation. His heart is quite won, and I fear it would not be difficult to break it. I, for one, should not like to try the effect of grief and disappointment on such a fragile frame. I resign my onerous responsibilities for the present to you and my cousin, Mrs. Vernon; but I shall come again ere long, and see how your task progreses."

"That is right. Do not desert us entirely," said the young woman, while tears stood in her eyes. "Remember, I count upon your friendship and good offices to make my peace with Admiral Champernowne and my sister: as well as—" she added, after a moment's hesitation, "to plead my cause with Sir John Desborough on his return to England. You shall be my principal witness."

"I will attend your summons at any moment, and meanwhile, I shall certainly testify in writing to your skill and wonderful patience. I am certain my little cousin owes his life to you."

Mrs. Chichester listened with manifest satisfaction.

"Remember, I may call upon you to attest this certificate of merit," she said. "Now I am going

indoors to write to my sister, and ask her to take charge of Violet a little longer. Miss Champernowne will rejoice in having my baby quite at her own disposal, and Elena will not disapprove of my remaining here. She is almost a Sister of Mercy, considering the house of mourning and sickness my proper sphere, and she never approved of our settling at The White House. I do not wish to deprive the kind old Admiral and his daughter of my sister's company at present. Some day or other she will visit me, if I remain long here."

She moved away with a certain calm air of authority peculiar to her, and gave some directions to the nurses; then, after playing for a few moments with the child, she went indoors. Alan Desborough looked at her wonderingly.

No one seemed in the least jealous of her influence, or disputed her will. The child absolutely idolised her, and Mrs. Vernon reposed implicit confidence in her judgment, and loved her as a friend. It would have been a cruel exercise of authority to separate the lonely woman and the motherless boy. Alan, at all events, did not feel disposed to exert the rather indefinite power intrusted to him for such a purpose; and after a conversation with Mrs. Vernon, in which she fully agreed with Mrs. Chichester in

the importance to be attached to her prolonged care of the delicate child, unfeignedly rejoiced that she was able and willing to remain with him, Alan Desborough departed alone; leaving his travelling companion on the way to his uncle's house established there for an indefinite period, and acting the part of a mother to the languid little heir of the Desboroughs.

For some weeks his faithful nurses had good ground to congratulate themselves on the improvement in the child's condition; but at the beginning of September intense heat set in, and the low ground of the park became decidedly unhealthy. Fever broke out in the adjoining hamlet, and the little boy's health flagged perceptibly. Mrs. Vernon, as well as Mrs. Chichester, at once became alarmed: and, as usual, the most energetic counsels prevailed. The younger woman this time, as on a previous occasion, in spite of the timid widow's scruples, had her own way.

What place could be better than the sea-side for the feverish patient? and who could be a better nurse than herself, to whom the child undoubtedly owed his life? Mrs. Vernon could, if she wished it, accompany them to the South Coast; whither, at all risks, Hugh must be taken. Of two alternatives the cautious woman, as is often the case, took the most

hazardous one; allowing her friend, who had great influence with her, to carry off her young charge, but refusing to accompany them, and abandon the supervision committed to her of her cousin Sir John Desborough's household.

It was not until she was standing, still a prey to useless irresolution, at the door of the Cambridgeshire mansion, where the carriage stood packed for departure, that Mrs. Vernon, with her eyes full of tears, said :

“ It is not likely—scarcely possible ; but still we must be prepared for all contingencies, and the last mail brought no letter from India. If Sir John were to arrive suddenly what must I say to him ? ”

“ Tell him that the child is safe, under my care and Alan Desborough's,” said Mrs. Chichester promptly “ But you are imagining what is impossible. Sir John has made no mention of a return to England.”

“ Not precisely ; but when Hugh was ill before, he said if the accounts of him had not improved he should have thrown up his appointment and sailed ; —that we had better be prepared at any moment to receive him. Oh, what should I say,” exclaimed the widow, clasping her hands, “ if he came whilst the child was away.”

“ Do not alarm yourself so unnecessarily,” said her

friend bitterly. "Men like Sir John Desborough do not throw up rank and fortune and position for a whim; or even to nurse a sick child. If Sir John did not come back to inquire after his lost wife, he is scarcely likely to do so now."

Mrs. Vernon shook her head.

"You do not know my cousin as well as I do. He has a very tender, faithful heart, in spite of—well, I suppose it may be a rather cold, hard manner. But I am afraid it is too late to make alterations now. Promise that you will bring Hugh back at a moment's notice, if there is any prospect of his father's return."

Mrs. Chichester did not acquiesce as promptly as her friend expected.

"Hugh must run no more risks to humour his proud father's whim," she said. "But do not fear. Whatever I do I will take all blame on myself. You shall be exonerated, and at any time you can come yourself to see him at The White House. I suppose," she added, forcing herself to smile, "that if you come armed with his father's authority, I shall not be able to dispute it."

Mrs. Vernon, though unconvinced, was over-ruled; and the wilful woman had her way.

P A R T T H E F O U R T H.

DESBOROUGH HOUSE.

“Dead ?—and no warning shiver ran
Across my heart, to say thy thread
Of life was cut and closed thy span !

“Could from earth’s ways that figure slight
Be lost, and I not feel ’twas so ?
Of that fresh voice the gay delight
Fail from earth’s air, and I not know ?”

MATTHEW ARNOLD.



CHAPTER XIII.

No storied hall, no ruin grey,
Yet I see her before me, night and day ;
Her face looks down from the pictured walls,
On the gay parterre her shadow falls.

I can see her pause by her infant's cot,
As I gaze at each well-remembered spot ;
I can hear her sighs by the little chair,
As it stands forsaken and empty there.

R. M. K.

ON one of the great racing-days of the autumn weeks; at Newmarket, and just at the moment, punctual as Admiral Champernowne's signal to dress for dinner, when the bell for the horses to start was ringing over the course, a train let off steam at the station. There were very few passengers in the first-class carriages, and only one gentleman got out at Newmarket. The train swept on between the clay banks and over the bare plains, and was out of sight in a moment.

The traveller looked about him in a sort of bewildered surprise. He had submitted to being treated like a perfect stranger by an obliging fellow-passenger, who had pointed out the little buff-washed cottage-inn where Nell Gwynne rested on her way to the races, and the beautiful grounds of Audley End. Now he inquired his road of a porter, after giving directions respecting his luggage ; and wended his way on foot, no carriage being procurable at the moment, by the shortest of the innumerable streets and by-ways which intersect the curious little town, built, apparently, more for the accommodation of horses than of human beings, towards the place where, nearly fifty years before, he had first seen the light of day.

This man had been more than thirty years in India. Railways had not intersected all parts of England when he started on his career ; and, at all events, had not reached Newmarket. He scarcely recognised the locality ; and, as the train flew along, his route appeared to cut through and distort hopelessly the threads of memory, which, in the course of years, had been worn very fine. He now walked slowly under the high walls, pierced with small windows, which seemed like eyes looking suspiciously down on the courts and stable-yards by which he passed

along ; silently, sadly, with the air of a person who, if he is going home, expects no welcome.

The High Street was quite deserted. All the inhabitants seemed gone to swell the crowd of many thousands, which yet looked like a speck on the vast heath, where even now the principal race of the season was being run ; but the dark-faced pedestrian walked on, turning his back to the course, and, with his thoughts far away and full of trouble, passed through the iron gates and entered the shadowy, secluded grounds of Desborough House.

A woman-servant, seeing a stranger standing irresolute on the mat at the side-door, came forward and inquired his business. All the men belonging to the establishment were on the race-course, and the girl felt a little afraid of the dusty traveller ; but his appearance was that of a gentleman, and the habits of the family were courteous though not hospitable. "Mrs. Vernon was at home," she said in answer to his question ; "would he like to step in and wait for her ?"

Another inquiry hovered on the lips of the dark-browed visitor, but was not uttered. He passed with a sigh over the threshold, and entered wearily a small room on the ground-floor, connected with the offices, where Mrs. Vernon transacted business. The light

flickered in through waving boughs, which were already losing their leaves, and gaining in their stead a golden gleam upon their scanty foliage.

No sound of merry childish voices, or of women's laughter rang through this dull mansion. A leaden stillness weighed upon the air, which was very oppressive. Almost unconsciously the stranger, while he waited, threw open a glass door, which opened into a small court, or garden, overhung by trees, and stepped outside; where he remained pacing silently from end to end of the straight gravel-walk, with the yellow autumn leaves falling ominously down upon him.

Mrs. Vernon, who was not a courageous woman, felt rather startled when, on entering the room, she saw a person, entirely unknown to her, thus unceremoniously making himself at home; plucking, and then throwing away a stray flower, and gazing inquisitively at the long lines of windows which looked down from the grey walls of the old house. She called to the woman-servant, desiring her to remain in the passage, and then went forward; meeting at the glass door the man who had sent for her, as he turned back upon hearing her entrance.

"Do not keep me in suspense, Emily. Have you

forgotten your cousin John Desborough ?" he said. " You have been the kind guardian of my child. Go and fetch my son Hugh. Let me at least have one welcome, even if it be a silent one, to this sad-looking house !"

Mrs. Vernon coloured deeply. She came forward and greeted her long-absent relative, whose marked yet much-altered features she could only very faintly recall after years of separation, and said in a timid manner :

" It grieves me, Sir John, not to be able to comply with your wishes at once, but little Hugh is absent on a visit at some distance. We will send for him home immediately."

Sir John Desborough looked at her with amazement. The disappointment was so great that his temper gave way.

" My child not here ! To whom have you ventured to intrust such a precious charge ? I thought there was an explicit understanding between us that you were never to lose sight of him ?"

" Pardon me, Sir John," said the widow. " In this case I have acted with the full sanction of your nephew, who is more your son's guardian than myself. In fact, little Hugh is near him, and under his charge now ; and I assure you, though I deeply regret

his absence, there is not the slightest cause for apprehension."

"Ridiculous!" said Sir John, his hot temper rising higher and higher. "What can a youth like Alan Desborough know of the treatment of children? I am surprised that you could reconcile yourself to such a breach of trust. Where is my son, Mrs. Vernon? I must follow him immediately."

"Let me persuade you to take some rest after your journey. I am ashamed that you should have been shown into this room. Shall I order a fire in the library? The evenings are already becoming chilly."

"I want nothing but to hear what you have done with my boy!" exclaimed Sir John in a perfect fury. "There is some mystery here. To whom, madam, besides my nephew, have you intrusted him?"

"To one who has been more to him than a mother," said Mrs. Vernon, bursting into tears. "Sir John, if you have a living child, you are indebted to her for his restored health and life. If you ever hear Hugh greet you as his father, it is to the kind woman who has him now under her charge that he owes the recovery from his recent dangerous illness, as well as the power to speak."

The impatient man was somewhat softened.

"Well, well, excuse me; I am afraid I am a little

irritable after my voyage. We Indians often are so. Give me, at least, a rational explanation of my child's extraordinary absence."

"Hugh has been very ill, and after his recovery, change of air was absolutely necessary," replied the widow. "A lady who has been staying at Newmarket several times, whom I mentioned to you in my letters as principally instrumental, under Providence, in regaining for him the power of speech, nursed him by night and by day for weeks; and with the consent of his medical attendants and Mr. Desborough, took him to her own house on the South-western Coast, for change of air, promising when he was strong enough to bring him back here with her."

Sir John still looked dissatisfied.

"Rather an unauthorised measure, but no doubt well meant. We will say no more about it, and I will try to get over what I confess has been a most bitter disappointment. But let the matter rest. My anxiety on my son's account has been so great that I could not remain in India. His motherless condition weighed upon my conscience; and another pressing duty, which I cannot enter upon at present, called me home. And now, madam, I will accept your kind offer, and adjourn to the library. Have

the goodness to order a fire to be lighted there. We Anglo-Indians are chilly, though we are passionate."

He shook hands with his cousin more cordially, and again apologised for his outburst of anger. Mrs. Vernon pitied him too much to be really offended ; and by all the womanly tact she possessed, strove to render his arrival at home as cheering as, under the circumstances of his tragical widowerhood and the absence of his little son, it could be expected to be. Sir John announced his determination to start by the first train the next morning, for the purpose of bringing Hugh to Desborough House."

" Ah, Emily," he said, reverting to early habits of confidential intimacy as he took leave for the night of his cousin, " I see that now I am in England I shall not be able to spare the little fellow out of my sight. Hugh is all I have left to remind me of his poor young mother. Perhaps we were not a well-assorted pair, and yet for a time—a period never to be renewed—in spite of disparity in years, we were happy together."

A very severe attack of indisposition, aggravated by mental anxiety and constitutional impatience, interfered with the choleric Anglo-Indian's intentions. For more than a fortnight he was confined to his

bed; attended by the local medical man, who had witnessed Mrs. Chichester's devotion to Hugh, and was never weary of praising her. No subject could be more interesting to his present patient, and his daily visits lasted much longer than the exigencies of the case required.

When Sir John was able to leave his room and adjourn to the library, though still unfit for travelling, Mrs. Vernon, who had unobtrusively ministered to his comfort without after their first trying meeting, obtruding herself upon him, was frequently his companion. His temper, easily altered, had regained its balance ; but anger was followed by profound melancholy, far more painful to witness. He confessed to his widowed cousin, whose soft manner and long familiarity with sorrow invited confidence, that, much as he desired reunion with his child, he yet, at times, dreaded the sight of the boy. The separation from her children had first occasioned alienation between himself and Lady Desborough. Bitterly did he now, had he ever since, regretted having thwarted her desire to keep her children yet a little longer with her ; a wish as natural as it was now proved to have been rational, at least in Hugh's case, since his long illness and infirmity of constitution had been brought on, the English physicians thought, by pining for his

loving young mother. He regarded himself as guilty with regard to his wife and their children. Had it not been for his own harsh, inconsiderate conduct all might now be alive and well. He thought more now of his Indian babies than he had ever done before. Mrs. Vernon, with more firmness than she usually manifested, combated this impression. Her sympathies were enlisted on her cousin's behalf, and an early inclination in his favour, almost forgotten during long years of sorrow, gave her insight into his character. They had been brought up together, though she was much younger than himself. Her childish partiality and romantic girlish tenderness had never been suspected by their object ; and the bitter tears she had wept after her hero's departure for India, totally unnoticed, had been dried by mortification and hot blushes at his neglect. Other sorrows, more real and recent, had nearly obliterated all recollections of the romance of her girlhood, but memory was revived by compassion ; and now, in his turn heart-broken and alone, the tender, womanly-hearted widow once more silently and unobtrusively watched over, loved and cherished her ungrateful kinsman.

She never resented his hot flashes of temper or discontented murmurs, regarding them as tokens of weakened health and a mind ill at ease. It was not

possible for one so self-denying and humble to take offence at trifles ; or regard herself as injured by some marked avoidance, when, at times, all her efforts failed to please, and her society was evidently unwelcome.

On these occasions she left Sir John Desborough quite undisturbed; but was always ready to cheer his solitude when, after some days' indulgence of his evil temper and of melancholy, he wearied of both ; and, in the gentle voice and smile which revived memories of childhood and youth, found some solace for his recent misfortunes. Like most other morbid feelings the more Sir John dwelt upon his own shortcomings with regard to his little son, the more he dreaded a reunion which would bring back all the troubles occasioned by what he now admitted to have been unwise obstinacy. He was not a man who understood dealing with women and children ; though he idolised his young wife, he knew in his heart that there were times when he had sorely tried, thwarted, and even neglected her. Hugh had never been fond of him; and the whole affection of his little heart had been bestowed upon the beautiful mother who never said an angry word to him, and loaded him with loving caresses which had made his father bitterly jealous. No wonder the tender child's heart and loving

tongue, just learning to speak only to her, died into silence when they were wrenched apart.

After all, since his fixed intention was to return to India, might it not be well to leave the boy, who was not of an age to accompany him to the East, with this new friend, herself a mother, who understood the management of his case so well? Separation from their parents, as he had long ago taken for granted, was the common lot of children born in India. How few of these little semi-orphans were as well cared for and as much beloved as Hugh appeared likely to be at The White House? Was it worth while to re-awaken painful, nearly, if not quite, obliterated recollections in the child's mind, and to harrow his own soul by a meeting, if they were to part almost immediately. Might it not be better not to risk with a boy so sensitively constituted this fresh trial of feeling? Immersed in these cogitations, and still nervously irritable, Sir John Desborough had not written once to his nephew since his arrival in England, and Mrs. Vernon was much too submissive to act independently, even if he had not strictly forbidden her making any communication of his wishes and intentions, either to Alan or Mrs. Chichester, without his permission. The gentle widow wondered more and more, as time went on, and Sir

John's health and temper improved, to see him take no steps towards recalling the child home. She had even ventured, at first, to offer to atone for her indiscretion by going herself to The White House to fetch little Hugh home, when the physicians said Sir John was not in a fit state to undertake so long a journey; but he sternly negatived the proposition. Nothing was to be said or done about bringing home the boy until he was sufficiently recovered to go himself in search of his long-lost treasure. English doctors were totally ignorant of the maladies brought on by a long residence in India. He should be well much sooner than was expected; ready for the journey, and to manage his own affairs, and arrange matters previous to his return to India. A very brief experiment had shown him that England, in his present desolate, widowed state, with its horrible fogs and easterly winds, would be the death of him in a twelvemonth.

"What am I going to do about the child?" he added, when his cousin murmured a feeble question. "Take him with me, I suppose," he exclaimed, recklessly and impatiently; "I don't want to be the death of my surviving child, my only earthly treasure, as it seems I have been of his little sisters. Much good, madam, England has done him! I

have never regretted but once, and that has been ever since, that I sent him back against his poor mother's wishes!"

"But Hugh *is* older now:—his mother, were she living, would scarcely wish to expose him at his present age to the danger of an Indian climate for children," sighed the widow, in her softest, saddest accents; thinking of her own lost darlings. "Excuse me, Sir John, I speak from experience."

"True, very true, poor thing! I can feel for you," her cousin said, taking her thin hand kindly in his own. "If Desborough House had been in one of the southern counties, if I could have left him in your care, Emily, I could have desired nothing better; I should not run the risk of which you have very properly reminded me. But Mrs. Chichester is a perfect stranger; and really, Emily, I am half ashamed to confess it—I have been such a recluse—people stigmatised me as a woman-hater: but no, no, I appreciate the goodness of your sex. Well, I own I am afraid of this strange lady, and I even dread seeing the child. He never cared for me. Of course I must go to The White House when I am a little stronger. Do you think Mrs. Chichester is in circumstances which might make it desirable for her to undertake, if I made her ample compensation, the temporary

charge of my son? in case," he added, "I should make up my mind to return to India. My appointment was to be kept open if I chose to resume military service: and old friends in the East—even my subalterns and subordinates, who love me better than wife and child of mine ever did—would be glad to welcome me."

Mrs. Vernon, always nervous about incurring responsibility, yet anxious to oblige one who, though not like herself, a widow, had lost a child, and was left forlorn and desolate, hesitated for a moment before replying. Sir John uttered an impatient ejaculation.

"Mrs. Chichester is not rich," his cousin said slowly. "I know that she parted with some handsome ornaments when she was at Newmarket. She said that she should never wear them again; and I helped her through the medium of a friend, who wished to make a handsome present to her son's bride, to dispose of them advantageously. She was of a very generous and somewhat haughty spirit. You must take care how you word your proposal when you see her at The White House."

"Perhaps it might be as well to write?" said Sir John. "What do you think, Emily? I like her better for not being mercenary. Upon my word,

after all that you and Dr. Maynard have told me about her, I scarcely like to take the child away from this woman, who has been like a mother to him. He will never love me half so well."

"Oh, you must not say that! You must not think so, John," said the widow, bursting into tears; and forgetting for the moment her usually respectful mode of addressing her cousin, the still warmly-loved companion of her childhood and youth. "Mrs. Chichester taught little Hugh to pray for you night and morning, and made him feel that his love and obedience were due to you. I should never have cared for her if she had not respected your rights and his poor mother's, as I had always done. She has, believe me, a most noble, upright heart. Hugh is sure to love you more and more as he grows older."

"Call me by my Christian name always, Emily," said her cousin; "there are few living persons who care to do so. I like to hear you say it. I cannot think why you treat me always so formally, as if I were your master, instead of your cousin. The obligations you pestered me about in your letters are mutual, if not all on your side. Fortune has favoured me in worldly matters, otherwise I am singularly destitute. You have taken care of my

motherless boy ; I, in return, have given you a home, which, but for your kindness and care of me and mine, would assuredly have been my grave—perhaps his. I assure you at first it opened upon me like a sepulchre. Mrs. Chichester, like yourself, seems alone in the world ; though you said the other day, if I recollect rightly, that she was not a widow ; but had lost a little boy about Hugh's age. I conclude her husband is a bad one. At all events she has known trouble, and I shall be glad to be of service to her in return for her kindness to my child ; but I doubt whether I am yet well enough to undertake a long journey. Even this conversation has tired me. I shall be glad of a basin of soup ; and we will talk the matter over again before I make up my mind and proceed to action."





CHAPTER XIV

"I leave the banquet-hall of time
As thou art coming in ;
Take thou my place, and be thy feas
Sweeter than mine has been.

"I quit the battle-field of life,
I give my sword to thee ;
It is thy father's sword, my boy,
It leads to victory.

"The farewells dying on my lips
Are living still on thine ;
'Tis sunrise on thy glowing peaks,
'Tis sunset upon mine."

HORATIUS BONAE.

Hugh Desborough made himself at home quickly in the sunny white house in the orchard ; whither, after spending a fortnight at a neighbouring bathing-place on the sea-coast, his kind friend had taken him. Mrs. Vernon's feeble resistance to his prolonged absence had been easily overcome ; and Alan could see nothing but what was likely to benefit his

little cousin in Mrs. Chichester's keeping Hugh with her.

No preparations for departure as yet marred the serene tranquillity of the place. The change, after his severe illness, had been highly desirable for the delicate child: and, now that a cooler temperature had set in all over England, the soft air of the South-western Coast, tempered by moisture, evidently suited him better than the keen breezes, alternating with sultry heat and damp fogs, among the Cambridgeshire fens and woodlands. As long as the bright weather lasted Mrs. Chichester meant to remain near her sister, who was still the cherished inmate of Admiral Champernowne's mansion. Later, if necessary, she would take him, and Violet, and Mrs. Vernon to Italy.

The trees in the orchard were still covered with rosy-cheeked apples, the leaves were turning to golden-yellow and crimson-russet, and the lady's flower-garden beneath the open window glowed with rainbow hues. Admiral Champernowne's woods on the hill-top were brown and bare, in comparison with the gorgeous foliage, lit up by the morning sunshine, and sheltered from the sea blast, in the hollow of the valley.

Mrs. Chichester and her sister were spending the

day with Juliet, and the little boy had constituted himself the baby's especial protector. Hugh liked nothing better than to hang flowers round her as she sat in her little carriage, or to shower them in her lap. It was true the innumerable blossoms of spring, the lavish garlands of summer, were faded ; but in sheltered nooks and in the sunny garden there were plenty of berries and brightly-tinted autumn flowers, and in the hedges, pale wreaths of traveller's-joy, which pleased his fancy. No lack of merry childish laughter, no need to complain of silence now, as the little fellow ran to and fro, rejoicing for the first time in vigorous health and spirits, chattering all sorts of incoherent nonsense to himself and the baby. The Cornish air, and still more, the wealth of affection lavished upon him, had produced a greater change than all the gold of India could have effected.

The small domain round the house in the orchard lay quite open to view ; and it was scarcely to be wondered at if the few passers-by sometimes stopped to look at the pleasant picture. Such, at all events, was the case with a gentleman who had left his carriage at the top of the hill ; and walked down the winding lane, deep in shadow, to where the sunny prospect suddenly burst upon him :—a world-worn, weary man, with marks of a trying climate and deep

sorrow upon him. He stood with his arms folded, leaning upon the gate; watching the happy child at play in the orchard, while the nurse and baby rested under the shadow of the tree. Little Hugh came running down the drive at sight of the stranger.

"Did oo want to come in?" he said sweetly. "Shall I get oo some milk? oo poor, tired, thirsty man."

The gentleman fixed his eyes upon him, but did not reply. Something in the stern gaze and absolute silence with which his instinctive courtesy had been received pained the sensitive child, and his eyes filled with tears. "Go away!" he said passionately, "oo naughty, rude man! Nobody wants oo!"

The Anglo-Indian's hot temper rose. He strode through the gate, pushing away the child as he strove to shut it, and went on, leaving Hugh crying violently.

The nurse rose, and came forward to see what was the matter. The little fellow's passionate weeping seemed to have taken all the peaceful serenity out of the landscape, as if an evil shadow had darkened over it.

"Is this Mrs. Chichester's house?" said the stranger harshly. "Can I speak to her? Make the

child stop crying. He will hurt himself by his silly passion."

"Sooner said than done," muttered the nurse angrily, for she had seen the discourteous action which had wounded the child's sensitive feelings. "My mistress is not at home, sir; this is Mrs. Chichester's house," she added civilly. "I am sorry I must not leave the children, or ask you to walk in, but you cannot mistake the way. This road leads round to Admiral Champernowne's house on the other side of the hill, where my mistress is spending the afternoon."

"I will show oo," said little Hugh, recovering his good temper as quickly as he had lost it. "It is not far off. I did not mean to be rude. Why, I think I have seen oo before—long ago. Wouldn't oo like to see baby?"

He pulled the stranger, who moved stiffly and reluctantly across the grass to where little Violet was sitting up among the flowers. A very strange emotion shot through the breast of the sun-dried, quick-tempered invalid, as the blue-eyed child smiled up at him. He stopped abruptly, and covered his eyes with his hand. The nurse thought that perhaps the stranger, embrowned by hot Eastern skies, had had a sunstroke, he looked so dark and wild.

"I think it must be papa," said Hugh, again showing signs of terror, and clinging to her skirts. "He was often cross like that. I hope he won't beat baby," the child added in an audible whisper.

"For shame, Master Hugh," said the nurse, pacifying him easily with caresses. "The gentleman is quite a stranger. Why, you heard him asking his way at the gate. Where are your manners? May I offer you a seat, sir?"

The traveller declined her somewhat unwilling courtesy, saying that his carriage was waiting for him. She need not give any message. He would write to Mrs. Chichester. Hugh took no more notice of him; the blue-eyed baby had fallen asleep. With one long, lingering gaze which took in every feature of the scene, the stranger tore himself away. He was not as forgiving as the little boy. He had not forgotten the impatient, childish phrase, "Go away, nobody wants oo!"

Mrs. Chichester was considerably surprised and alarmed on her return home by the nurse's account, mingled with comments made by Hugh, of her mysterious visitor; but no message or letter reached her, and her apprehensions died away: though at first Hugh persisted in saying that the naughty, rude man was poor papa, come very tired and cross from India.

The woman-servant was equally sure that the intruder was a perfect stranger; most likely some one with a petition, or an impostor wanting to rob the house. She had been terribly frightened, not daring to leave the children to summon assistance. People knew that her mistress came from India. One story did just as well as another for tramps. Her account and the little boy's differed in almost every particular, as is often the case where exactness is required. Hugh said the stranger was ever so tall, like a giant; very strong and well dressed. The nurse said he looked like a thread-paper, as if the wind might blow him away; and that his clothes were dusty and shabby.

In a few days, as nothing further occurred to remind the inmates of The White House of his visit, the remembrance of the weary, uncourteous wayfarer was almost entirely put aside. Hugh alone faintly remembered, and occasionally mentioned him; wondering whether he got home; and expressed his satisfaction that, owing to his own manly protection, "the stranger had not hurt or stolen the baby."

Elena Bianchi had explained, not without difficulty, to Admiral Champernowne, the most matter-of-fact person in existence, how important a part his banished

son had performed in the rescue of herself and her sister. She was always very candid with him ; and his ready sympathy rewarded the effort which it cost a naturally timid person to brave the old officer's frequent outbreaks of impatience. Juliet had learnt the lesson of truthfulness and courage in dealing with her father on ordinary occasions from her young governess, but she shrank from trusting him with the secret of her attachment for Alan Desborough.

Gerald came to the Signorina's assistance, and at once enlisted his father's interest in the fate of the ship ; avowing, for the first time, that he had taken a passage in the "Lord Clyde" on his return from the East, and had fortunately been of use to Mrs. Chichester and Miss Bianchi.

"Upon my soul, this is the best thing I have heard of you!" said the Admiral. "Far beyond all your tiger-hunting in Bengal! Why on earth, Gerald, have you never told me before that you got our dear little Signorina out of the sinking ship ; and not only that, but that you snatched her from the jaws of ocean ; and saved her from sharing the terrible fate of the boat's crew, lost within sight of safety. I look upon it as a personal obligation!"

He shook hands cordially with the young girl who

had found a home under his roof. Juliet clung to her with the fond love of a sister.

"There, there, my dear, don't distress the Signorina. What on earth are you crying about? she is not going to leave us and incur fresh perils. What a child you are still, Juliet."

"Don't cry," said little Hugh, who had come up to see Miss Champernowne, with whom he was a great favourite; and using the tender appellations which of late he had bestowed on his kind friends; "Mammie shan't take Auntie away if oo don't like it."

"No, no, little hero," said the Admiral; "I put my veto on that. La Signorina shall not go back to India if we can help it. You had much better all of you stop at The White House; Cambridgeshire is as much too cold for you in winter, as it was too hot in summer; and we will muster a strong party here for Christmas."

Hugh assented willingly. He was very fond of the sunny house in the orchard.

"Only, if poor papa should come home and want me, I s'pose I must go."

"To be sure, to be sure. What a good little fellow it is," said the Admiral approvingly. "I used to wonder at your sister's infatuation about those Newmarket friends; but I quite understand her love for

that boy." Suppose you and the Signorina go down to The White House, Gerald, and persuade Mrs. Chichester to come up and spend the rest of the day with us, as Hugh says he must go home now."

Gerald seconded the movement. Juliet and Alan agreed to accompany them; but there was a considerable interval between the two couples as they walked down the green lanes. Hugh ran between them, gathering blackberries, offering them alternately to Juliet and the Signorina.

"How have you obtained such wonderful influence over my father?" said Gerald to his companion, as they walked on in front together.

"By never seeming afraid of him, and always telling him the whole truth if I mentioned any circumstance. From the first he was very kind to me; but perhaps, as I am naturally timid, I might have been a little frightened if I had not observed that perfect frankness always disarmed his short-lived anger. When I learnt this lesson myself, I taught Juliet to practise it, and it has never failed to answer."

"How dare you talk of perfect frankness when you yourself are an enigma!" said Gerald, laughing. "I am always on the point of calling you and your sister by your proper names; but I will not break

my promise to her, any more than I did the one to you, if I can help it."

"Pardon me," said the girl simply. "Before I had been a week in your father's house I told him all that it was necessary that he should know about me. Bianchi was my mother's name, and I adopted it, just as he used initials when we corresponded about my future position in his household. I said what was true, that I was poor, and that I had no friends in England; for that my married sister's connections had behaved unkindly to me, and I did not wish to apply to them for a home or reference. He trusted me, and asked no further questions. I do not know that it is prudent; but, as a rule, he does not ask for the characters of members of his household, preferring to judge for himself. He says if services are valuable, people do not like to be deprived of them. It is one of his peculiarities—crotchets, I think you call them. Well, it suited me to profit by his generous confidence, and I have not abused it. Mr. Champernowne, I love your father. I do not fear him the least atom in the world now; and he has promised me a home at Sunset as long as I like to stay. He has been to me, in fact, like a father. Ah! you do not know him, you and Juliet, even now that you are no longer children. You shut up

your hearts from him, and all he wants is to enter in. You say he has made you lonely and miserable. Has it never occurred to you that he too has missed his good beautiful wife, and found no friends in his children? The first time I entered his library he was looking at little pictures which you had sent home to your sister, and which she, child-like, had left about the rooms carelessly, and was very angry to find missing. *He* had them all treasured up. Since that time he has often shown them to me, with your mother's picture, and verses he has written. Because he is rough of speech a little, you have been very hard upon him; you have deserted, almost ceased to love him. Ah! you have the shortcomings of many years to make up."

Gerald listened with his head bowed down, without interrupting her, until Elena stopped speaking; then he said gravely :

" You are right, Helen—may I not call you so, since you have been so true a friend to us all ? Henceforward I will try to practise the lesson you have taught me, though I own it needs some courage to face my irascible parent. Your gentleness has disarmed him—shorn the lion of his mane. It does not bristle up as fiercely as of yore, and lies down quite smoothly when your hand is laid upon it. As long

as you remain at Sunset I believe it will be possible for me to keep on good terms with its master, but not longer."

They had arrived by this time at the gate of Gerald Champernowne's small domain. As he paused to open it, he said :

" But I have still one question to ask you. When we first met at The White House, you said that it might pain me more to know that your sister was married, than to learn that you were and had been fettered by indissoluble ties. Was this really your conviction ?"

" Yes," said the girl, stooping to gather a late autumn rose from the border, after passing through the gate. " Perhaps it was wrong and foolish of me to hesitate about giving you pain by undeceiving you, but my sister on board the Indiaman had spoken laughingly to me of your attentions, and said that you took her for Miss Forester. When I saw you leaning over the ship's side, looking out to sea, with your whole soul in your eyes, I felt sure that you loved her ; and I did not think that you were likely to be a light holiday wooer. I blamed her, and I pitied you."

" Was that all ? Did you retain this impression ?" said the young man, striving to obtain a glimpse of

the slightly averted face, hidden by a large shadowy hat. "Do you still think, Helen, after all we went through together, that it is of more importance to me by what name your sister is to be called than your own? Well, no matter; in time, when you know me better, I trust this illusion, like others under which we both have laboured, will be dispelled. At all events you have promised not to leave us. You will remain with the old man who loves you, I verily believe, as well as his own daughter. You will continue to teach his children to understand him better than in times past; whilst your gentle influence will make the task less difficult, by inducing him to make allowance for our growth in years and stature, and not to treat us like a couple of children."

Helen did not gainsay his request, and they entered The White House together.

Meanwhile, Juliet and Alan Desborough still lingered on their walk. Perhaps the young man guessed from his friend's manner that an interruption might be inopportune; for he detained his companion till Gerald and the Signorina were out of sight and hearing. Many a time, during his stay at Sunset, had Alan and Juliet wandered together in the lanes and on the brink of the deep pools; and, long before the present moment, the question had been asked

and answered which bound them to each other; but the young girl trembled whenever her lover spoke of a reference to her father. The young man's straightforward nature rebelled against concealment; but, hitherto, he had obeyed her wishes.

Now he urged her vehemently to consent to his revealing their mutual attachment to the Admiral. It was true that they might have to wait some time before he could offer her a home, but he wished to have her father's approbation of their engagement.

"He will not suffer us to be the only unhappy ones, Juliet," he said. "The Signorina will take your place."

Juliet started. Absorbed in other considerations she had not perceived her brother's love for her gentle instructress. A jealous pang shot through the half-Italian girl's frame.

"You think that Gerald loves her?" the sister exclaimed; "that they will not miss me! Alan, it is cruel of you to say so."

"Nay, dearest, not if I give you another heart to lean upon," said young Desborough tenderly. "It is natural that Gerald should marry; I saw almost from the first moment that he loved your beautiful governess; though I did not know the romantic circumstances amid which their affection sprang up,

and that he had saved her life. Your father will indeed miss you sorely, but let us hope that he will not be altogether lonely ; and, forgive me if I cannot help rejoicing, selfishly it may be, in any change which may partially reconcile him to losing his best treasure."

"It is I who am selfish, Alan," said Juliet penitently. "If you knew how, all my life through, I have sorrowed and suffered for my brother!—but you are right, and the pang is past. For the moment it almost seemed like losing him again : but I love the Signorina dearly ; and, if I am to give up the first place in any heart but yours, I would rather resign it to her than to another."

They turned again after reaching the white gate ; and were still walking up and down under the high hedges, when Gerald and the Signorina came in sight : bringing back Mrs. Chichester from The White House, to take part in Admiral Champernowne's musical entertainment.





CHAPTER XV

Cast o'er Time's sea thy sobering shades,
Let Autumn strip our leafy glades,
Upon our shuddering shrinking sight
Let loose thy stormy terror's might ;
But send some glimmering stars to guide
Our feet across Life's troubled tide.

R. M. K.

ADMIRAL CHAMPERNOWSE'S wood burnt cheerily on the open hearth at The White House; and Mrs. Chichester was sitting in her favourite place between the fire and the window the following morning, at a rather early hour, when Alan Desborough was announced as a visitor. Hugh was playing near the glass door, which stood open; the little boy, warmly wrapped up, ran in and out as often as he liked.

Such a look of care sat on the young man's usually candid, cheerful countenance that Mrs. Chichester took the alarm. She was often very nervous, and a change of expression, an altered tone, made her

tremble. "Is anything the matter?" she said hurriedly. "My sister—the Admiral—are all well at the great house?"

"Yes, yes," said Alan, somewhat absently. "All is well—I believe—I hope. I have not seen any one this morning. I was earlier, or the rest were later—I scarcely know which. Matthews brought me a cup of coffee when he saw that I was busy—that my letters had discomposed me—and that I was in fact preparing for a sudden departure. I shall bid my kind friends good-bye presently, one hates saying farewell half a dozen times over, and I wished to see you. Should you mind telling Hugh to take his playthings upstairs, or out of doors?"

Mrs. Chichester rose immediately, and taking the little boy by one hand and some of his toys in the other, led him out on the lawn; telling him to play under the great walnut-tree, which formed a complete shelter, and when he was tired to go up to Violet and nurse. Her manner to the child was very calm and kind; but when she returned into the room and closed the window, Alan noticed that her bright complexion had faded. He did not keep her in suspense.

"Do not alarm yourself," he said kindly and considerately. "Your little charge will not be taken

from you. Sir John Desborough fully appreciates your care and tenderness. Hugh was right in thinking that the wayworn, weary traveller who came to your gate last week was his father. My uncle is at Desborough House."

Mrs. Chichester's cheeks became still whiter, and every limb trembled. She did not attempt to speak. Alan went on, trying to reassure her. "Sir John returned to England quite suddenly. He is often impetuous; and he likes, I think, to take people by surprise and find them unprepared. His letter to me was like a thunder-clap, and I am quite sorry for Mrs. Vernon; of whom, however, he writes with the warmest approbation. It was a shock to him when he found his child absent. At first the disappointment made him ill, but now that he understands the whole state of the case—more especially now that he has seen the great improvement which has undoubtedly taken place in his little son's health and spirits, my uncle is most deeply grateful to her and to you. He regrets that your absence prevented his expressing to you personally his feelings of obligation and regard."

Alan Desborough paused, but Mrs. Chichester did not utter a syllable.

"My uncle's first impulse and intention was to

take Hugh back with him to Desborough House," continued young Desborough with some hesitation. "But, luckily or unluckily, Hugh's reception of his at first unknown father was not satisfactory, and Sir John does not understand dealing with children. Some expression of Hugh's offended him deeply, and he retains the idea that his presence is unwelcome. The memory of his young wife, Hugh's ill-fated mother, haunts him. He finds it impossible to remain in England. After much consideration he authorises me to ask whether, as the boy is too old now to return with him to the East, any arrangement could be made which would induce you to continue to exercise your present watchful care over his motherless child?"

Mrs. Chichester seemed scarcely to understand him. The joy he had fully expected her to manifest at this proposal was not shown in her pale, agitated countenance.

"What a marvellous escape I have had," she said, half unconsciously. "I beg your pardon, I do not think I quite catch your meaning. Tell me over again. Was it really Sir John Desborough who came to The White House—who saw Hugh and Violet last week?"

"Yes, it was really and truly Hugh's father. He

said so at the time, but no one believed him," answered Alan. "There is no danger of your having to part with the little fellow, if you really are kind enough to wish to keep him. It is very fortunate that he has so kind a friend. But, of course, it is you who must decide."

"There is no doubt about the matter," said Mrs. Chichester sharply; "if Hugh does not accompany his father his place is here. Does Sir John intend to leave England soon?"

"Immediately," replied Alan. "He has already taken measures, in case you consent to his proposal, and kindly allow Hugh to remain under your charge, for an entire expatriation. Hard work alone, he says, makes life bearable. He wishes me to follow his example, and offers me the post of secretary. I suppose I ought to accept it."

Mrs. Chichester looked up in his clouded face with more animation than she had yet shown. "Yes, yes, of course; do not let him go alone. You are his nearest of kin after his own offspring."

"He has always been my best friend," said Alan. "His offer is a very handsome one. If I can persuade others to think so, I have no objection. Well, time will show; I did not come here to talk about my affairs, but yours. Will you allow me to read to

you that part of my uncle's letter which concerns yourself and Hugh?"

Mrs. Chichester assented silently. The nervous trembling Alan had observed again convulsed her frame. In vain she clasped her hands to hide their shaking. She dared not trust herself to speak. Sir John Desborough's expressions were as kind as his proposals were liberal. No written or spoken words, he said, could declare his gratitude and respect for the woman who had saved Hugh's life. He forgave her for having stolen the child's affections, and implored her not to give up the charge which she had voluntarily, for a time, undertaken. Then followed minute details, into which it is unnecessary to enter, respecting the return he wished to make for her kind guardianship during the next few years; and, if she were willing to continue the trust after Hugh's school-life commenced, for his spending his vacations under her roof. The only stipulation made was that her residence must be in the southern counties. Desborough House would be shut up during Sir John's absence.

"What is to become of Mrs. Vernon?" said Mrs. Chichester, interrupting Alan suddenly. "I seem to be behaving very unhandsomely towards a person who has been most kind to me. Never mind all these

details about money. If I take charge of the little boy let all be arranged according to his father's wishes. I shall have no scruples, make no objections ; but why should not Mrs. Vernon continue to reap these advantages ? We could live near each other."

"Mrs. Vernon has formed other plans," said Alan carelessly ; "at least my uncle wishes her to do so. I am not quite sure whether it is settled." He glanced again at the letter. "Yes," he said, "it is here in the postscript. Sir John says, ' You will be glad, for my sake, to hear that my cousin Emily has consented to go out with me, and superintend my Indian establishment.' "

Mrs. Chichester's hitherto pale cheeks flushed crimson. She raised her head haughtily, and said :

"His cousin Emily ! I never heard Mrs. Vernon speak of him so familiarly. The relationship was surely a very distant one ?"

"They were a great deal together at one time," answered Alan. "I have heard that, in early youth, when Mrs. Vernon was extremely pretty, there was an attachment —more perhaps on her side than his. But that was long years ago. Probably both parties have forgotten all about it. My uncle went out to India and the young lady married another person ; and was, I believe, very happy, until the death of her

husband and children left her a sorrowing childless widow; with little remains, beyond the sweet expression in her faded face, of her former beauty. As for my uncle, he still seems quite broken-hearted, and declares positively that he shall never marry."

"So all disconsolate widowers say," answered Mrs. Chichester very bitterly. "I do not usually put much trust in their protestations. Not that I should imagine Mrs. Vernon to be a person likely to shake his wise resolutions. He could not have chosen a less dangerous and more suitable companion."

"Well, I am not sure that I entirely agree with you," said Alan, smiling. "They are such complete contrasts that extremes may meet. Her gentleness is very winning, and she is quite young when compared to my uncle. Left alone in the world as he is, I should not be in the least surprised if, during the long tête-à-tête on board the Indiaman, he were to make his cousin an offer."

Mrs. Chichester rose hastily. She checked the first expressions which rose to her lips, and said coldly :

"Pardon me, this is not a subject I care to discuss. Am I not interfering with your preparations and leave-takings?"

Alan felt himself dismissed, and out of favour.

The queen-like woman was not trembling now. Her face glowed, her voice was steady, her eyes sparkled. She evidently wished for his departure. He felt much grieved at having, he knew not how, wounded her quick feelings; and assured her of his own deep gratitude, as well as Sir John's, for her care of Hugh, and hopes that she would continue her good offices.

"Rely upon it, Hugh shall not suffer," she said, recovering her composure and frankly extending her hand. "Sir John Desborough's proposals are most gratifying, but I think I must bestow a little more consideration upon them before I accept his liberal offers. Tell him that I will think them over and write to you when I have quite made up my mind."

"Would it not be better for you to write to my uncle? or perhaps a personal interview would be more satisfactory to both parties. It is best in matters of importance to deal with principals," said Alan, somewhat disappointed by her hesitation. "I do not think I can have done my uncle justice."

"No, no," said Mrs. Chichester, her agitation returning. "I cannot see or write to Sir John Desborough. If he wishes to bid Hugh good-bye the child can go to him; Mrs. Vernon might come and fetch him," she added, after a moment's considera-

tion. "Tell her that I shall hope to see her before she leaves England."

Hugh came down from the nursery to bid his cousin good-bye. He had soon tired of playing by himself, like most children, and was glad to be summoned back to the drawing-room. When told that his father was in England, and had come to see him, the child's eyes filled with tears; and he cast his arms fondly round Mrs. Chichester's knees, as if fearing to be taken away from her. Nevertheless, after a momentary struggle, the little fellow said bravely :

"Tell poor papa that I remembered him, and was glad to see him. I did not mean to be naughty. When will he come and see us at The White House again?"

Mrs. Chichester kissed him fondly.

"Be sure that you repeat the child's words, and add mine," she said gravely. "I am sorry that I cannot ask Sir John Desborough to visit me here, but he shall see Hugh before he leaves England; and he may depend on my not allowing his child to forget him."

Alan bade her farewell respectfully, returning to the Admiral's house to complete his preparations for departure. He knew that he was leaving one

sorrowful heart behind him ; but his hurried adieus were not final ones. The Admiral entreated him to come down into Cornwall again before leaving England, and Alan cordially accepted the old officer's hospitable invitation.





CHAPTER XVI.

Oh, could that happy peaceful time
Have been prolonged by wish of mine,
And no disturbing fitful gleams
Have waked us from our blissful dreams,
Life would become too bright and dear
And hopes grow dim that now shine clear.

R. M. K.

GERALD CHAMPERNOWNE was returning home alone after a good day's shooting, through the woods which wore now the gay livery of autumn; when, suddenly, at a turn in the winding, deeply rutted road near The White House, he met his tenant, Mrs. Chichester. Very little conversation had passed between them since his return home. In general she seemed to prefer talking with his father, who always devoted himself to her.

On this occasion she was in a different humour, and, after patting the tired dogs, and inquiring what sport their master had found, Mrs. Chichester turned

and walked along the muddy road in the same direction; leading not to her own dwelling, but towards the Admiral's mansion. She commiserated him on the loneliness caused by his friend's departure, and spoke of the prospect opening before Alan Desborough in the East. Gerald said that he should miss him extremely. They had been comrades so long that he scarcely understood how to get on without him.

For the first time Mrs. Chichester's manner was quite cordial and unembarrassed. Hitherto, Gerald thought, the consciousness that he alone knew her real name and position had been always painfully present to her when they were together. He longed to dispel the mystery which formed the only bar between himself and her sister. The Signorina, he was convinced, would never allow him to speak of his attachment until she was freed from her present disguise; whilst, at the same time, she hesitated before resuming her own name, fearing to displease her sister. She had promised to await her consent before revealing their mutual secret. The present opportunity seemed too favourable to be suffered to escape; and Gerald, as he removed the obnoxious blackberry briars from the lady's path, was pondering how to introduce the subject when Mrs. Chichester said, suddenly and frankly:

" You are the only person, Mr. Champernowne, acquainted, even imperfectly, with my sad story. May I look upon you as a friend ? "

" Say, rather, a brother," said Gerald, with animation. " I hope to have soon the right of claiming that relationship. At present Helen will not allow me to speak of my attachment. Can I do anything to serve you in the meantime ? "

Mrs. Chichester coloured deeply as they shook hands. " Helen will not listen to your proposals until I release her from her vow of secrecy. Mr. Champernowne, I am thoroughly ashamed of myself ; my only excuse is that I was scarcely more than a child when I married a man too little used to women's ways to guide a very wilful girl. My first days of freedom after I became a woman were those spent on board the 'Lord Clyde.' Your kindness made them pass very happily. Then came the frightful storm ; the near prospect of death ; and that sobered me :—and yet I have been very wayward since."

She paused. Gerald listened with interest. He did not interrupt her.

" I never felt guilty till I saw my child. When I watched little Hugh tended by other hands—when I tried to make him speak—I hated myself. If the

dear child had not recognised me in his heart, though his poor, feeble voice could not betray me, I should have died. But he knew me from the first; and I felt that I alone could restore to him the faculty he had lost. I was still of some use in the world. Even when he called me mother no one guessed the truth. The fact is, I am so completely lost! It is as if the boiling caldron into which the good ship went down had really engulfed me. I cannot get back into my place."

Gerald could not repress a smile.

"I do not think I ever quite realised the value of my position in life till I heard that another woman might very possibly step into it;" continued Mrs. Chichester. "I have always thought it rested only with myself to drop the mask, and therefore it pleased me to keep it on. Yesterday, Mr. Champernowne, your friend Alan, made me see my conduct in a quite different light. I shudder to think on the brink of what a terrible abyss I have been standing,—of what the results to myself and others might have been of my headstrong folly."

"Well, it is not too late; you have only to go back to Desborough House. Take little Hugh to plead your cause. Sir John Desborough would be more or less than man if he resists your eloquence,

backed by that rosy little rogue's testimony to your loving care."

Mrs. Chichester was about to answer, when the dogs commenced barking; and the Admiral, parting the brambles with his stick, came suddenly from a by-path upon the road, right in front of them. He did not look quite pleased at finding his handsome favourite and his long-exiled son and heir tête-à-tête in the thicket; and gave a sharp knock to each of the noisy animals to vent his wrath.

"Don't you know your own master's step and voice, you curs?" he exclaimed, as the dogs, with their tails down, crept disconsolately to the rear of the small party. "Hallo, Gerald! who expected to find you here. I thought you would have been farther afield, and these lanes are not tempting for ladies," he added; looking suspiciously at Mrs. Chichester, who had coloured high with vexation. "I was on my way to The White House, feeling sure of finding you at home at this late hour for an autumn afternoon; but there is no accounting for people's fancies!"

Mrs. Chichester turned immediately homewards; but the Admiral was too much out of humour to accept her suggestion that he should pay his visit now at The White House, which was visible at no great distance through the trees. The old officer

was too much a man of the world not to see that his sudden approach had been inopportune, and that he had interrupted a more than usually exciting and interesting conversation. The crimson blush on the lady's cheek, such a glow as no commonplace remark or compliment would have brought there, had not even now subsided. Gerald, when his father declined to accompany Mrs. Chichester home, immediately offered himself as her escort; and they went down the woodland path together.

The Admiral's solitary walk back to his own home was a very dull one. After all, Gerald seemed likely to be as great a torment as ever. Rough campaigning and a wild life in the bush were not likely to have improved his principles or manners. What did he mean by returning to England in the "*Lord Clyde*" as a steerage passenger? He had only to write to his father, to express proper regret and intentions of amendment, and all would have been forgotten and forgiven. But that was just what a proud young fellow like him would not do; and so he must lower himself, and put up with all kinds of insult and humiliation rather than say a civil word at home. How had he become so intimate with those ladies, when they, of course, were in a different part of the vessel? Where on earth was her husband? Why

did she never mention him? Those half widows were uncommonly dangerous individuals; he trusted Gerald would not make a fool of himself.

The inevitably punctual dinner-hour arrived without bringing Gerald home; though the large bell pealing out over the valley could, with the wind in its present quarter, be plainly heard at The White House. The Admiral had decided that they were not to wait; and gave his arm to the Signorina, the moment the servant announced that dinner was on the table. Juliet, her heart still sore and throbbing after parting with her lover, looked pale and absent; but Helen was radiantly lovely, and attended to her host's conversation with undisturbed serenity. No explanation was given of Gerald's absence. The two girls imagined, as the Admiral made no remark on the subject, that the sport he was pursuing had carried him farther away from home than usual. When this was the case he and Alan had once or twice dined together in the library, not to disturb the Admiral.

There was a sort of pitying chivalrous courtesy in the old officer's manner to the Signorina, which surprised and gratified her. He went into the music-room with her and his daughter, and asked them to play to him; but the music seemed flat without Mrs. Chichester's splendid voice, and after a brief per-

formance, Helen offered to read the newspaper to him. Her voice and intonation, always pure and perfect, never failed to give him pleasure; and a word whispered by her young governess had roused Miss Champernowne to the necessity of exertion. By the time coffee was brought in, the Admiral was in a much better temper; and had almost forgotten, while his pretty companions devoted themselves to his amusement, that Gerald was still a defaulter. This last evil was remedied in some measure when Gerald made his appearance in faultless evening costume, and explained that, finding he was rather late, he had desired the servants to bring refreshments into the library. He had not even entered The White House, it appeared; but the short path through the thicket was so muddy that Mrs. Chichester had been obliged to retrace her steps and go home by the road. Helen, the Admiral observed, did not appear to be at all jealous or distrustful, when the young man calmly and coolly gave this account of his proceedings, merely saying that she wondered Laura had not made him dine with her, as she had detained him so long.

As usual, her sweet serenity smoothed the rugged mane of the old sea lion, and the remainder of the evening passed pleasantly.

Admiral Champernowne still remained in some curiosity respecting the conversation he had interrupted; but, respecting this, when they were left alone, Gerald offered no explanation, and his father did not venture to question him. He was beginning to see and to act upon the impression that his son was no longer a boy who might be coerced and thwarted at will, and to stand somewhat in awe of his manly, high-spirited representative. In this increasing sense of Gerald's importance to his own happiness, and in the dread of again driving him away, lay the secret spell which governed his gusty fits of impetuosity almost as effectually as the Signorina's gentle speech and winning ways. Sooner than part with her or Gerald, the Admiral would have curbed his passionate will, and comported himself like a lamb instead of a lion.



PART THE FIFTH.

THE SUNNY NOOK IN THE ORCHARD.

“Forget me not when spring-time comes,
With flower, and bird, and song,
Tho’ I no more beside you stand,
Or roam the flowers among.

“Forget me not when warmer suns
On the deep waters play,
Tho’ fairer forms be round you grouped,
And hearts more light and gay.

“When winter casts his icy shroud
O’er sky and earth and sea,
When Christmas fires are burning bright,
Oh! then remember me.

“When low you kneel before the throne,
And feel that God is near,
Remember me with kindness then,
And name me in your prayer;

“As one who faulty though she be
Can love both long and well,
Who ne’er forgets a kindly word,
Who sadly says ‘Farewell.’”

A. G. V.



CHAPTER XVII.

"And the palm gave up its blossoms
To its friend so wise and old,
And saw them all, unsighing,
Float down the river's gold.

"The amber tresses vanished,
And the dear spring-fragrance fled,
But the welcome fruit in clusters
Came richly up instead.

"Tis thus we gain by losing,
And win by failure here;
We doff the gleaming tinsel
The golden crown to wear,

"Our sickness is our healing,
Our weakness is our might;
Life is but death's fair offspring,
And day the child of night."

HORATIUS BONAR.

NOTHING could be farther from the thoughts of Sir John Desborough and Mrs. Vernon than the renewal of their long-past, well-nigh-forgotten, youthful romance. Mrs. Vernon, perhaps, remembered it better

than the Indian general; but, even in her faithful memory, the bright tints had faded, the once dulcet tones were cracked and feeble. This woman, a widow indeed, a bereaved mother, regarded her cousin with more tenderness than his arbitrary temper and short phrases were calculated to excite in those who had not known him before the wear and tear of an arduous life had altered a manner and person which she remembered to have been very attractive.

Sir John was quite absorbed now in his preparations for returning to the East; whither, totally unconscious that any one could misrepresent her motives and misjudge her conduct, Mrs. Vernon had half consented, with some reluctance, to accompany him; her acquiescence had not been as complete as Alan had supposed, and she was still a prey to mental inquietude and indecision. Her charge had been taken from her, and she had no other tie in England. Her cousin's liberal arrangements would make her quite independent. If her early unrequited attachment had anything to do in the matter, it was merely that it made her regard the solitary widower with more compassion than the rest of the world bestowed upon him.

His cold austere bearing did not disguise from her

the deep dejection in which he was plunged by the loss of his beautiful wife; nor his regret, amounting even to despair, for his conduct towards her. Sir John, in a moment of unwonted confidence, had revealed to her the nature of their alienation; and accused himself bitterly of having been the cause of her death, by separating her too soon from her little son, since it was partly on Hugh's account that she had insisted on leaving India. The child had also suffered from his obduracy; had Hugh died he should have been the murderer. Differences, which had led to a serious quarrel and contemplated separation, had also arisen on the subject of a younger sister to whom she desired to offer a home; but Sir John owned that he could not bear any intrusion on the privacy of their domestic life. He was jealous of the very ground she trod upon, at the very time when his young wife doubted the reality of his affection.

"Nay, you must not exaggerate your errors and shortcomings," said Mrs. Vernon soothingly. "Perhaps Lady Desborough's ill-health made her a little fanciful. I am quite sure that you never treated any woman unkindly."

"What do you mean by ill-health?" said Sir John sharply. "Laura never had a day's illness in her

life, excepting when her babies were born. She left India a very picture of health and beauty. The climate suited her admirably."

"Then I suppose the voyage disagreed with her," replied the widow, calmly but gravely. "I have not mentioned the subject before, for fear of distressing you; but a lady, Mrs. Chichester in fact, who was on board the 'Lord Clyde,' told me that Lady Desborough was considered to be at death's door when the vessel struck." She went on hesitatingly, while her companion, lost in wonder, remained silent. "One of those bewildering messages from the deep sea was brought here; telling us that a boat had been launched before the one in which Admiral Champernowne's son escaped, left the wreck. But the hope that Lady Desborough might have been saved was never confirmed."

Sir John was much agitated. "A report, a hope, a message from the deep! Why was not I told of this sooner?" he exclaimed, walking up and down the room in violent emotion. "I cannot understand all these concealments!"

"Indeed, indeed, it was not my fault! I did not mean to deceive you! It is so terrible to raise false hopes, and there has never been the slightest real revival of them in this case," said Mrs. Vernon, while

tears fell from her eyes. "Mrs. Chichester made every inquiry at the time, and she has since seen Mr. Champernowne, one of the few survivors of the wreck besides herself and her sister. Nothing has ever transpired respecting your unfortunate wife, who was ill in her cabin, and went down with the ill-fated vessel."

"They ought to have saved the women and children first," said Sir John, stopping short in his walk. "Did you say that a man—a young man—lived to tell the tale that he left them to perish?—Women, ill, helpless—oh! how differently it sounds from my blooming Laura as I last saw her! I hope I may never meet this young Champernowne—I could not bear to see him."

"He is a great friend of your nephew, Mr. Alan Desborough, whom you are expecting to-morrow. He spoke very highly of him; and I think Mrs. Chichester told me that he gave up his place in the boat to her or her sister, I quite forget which of them it was. I know she said that it was impossible to rescue Lady Desborough. *She* had never left her cabin during the voyage, and was spoken of as an invalid in an almost hopeless state."

Sir John looked at her with amazement. "Alan will perhaps be able to throw some light on this

mystery," he said. "Laura was never an invalid. Her sister Helen, I believe, on the contrary, was always delicate. I did not like them to be constantly together. Ah, Emily, my whole life has been a blunder! All my vain, futile, selfish precautions ended in the death of these two poor girls, probably locked in each other's arms! That must have caused the mistake. Laura, no doubt, would not leave her sister—just like her, my noble, courageous darling!—and so, while others were saved, they lost their chance of life. Do not let us ever mention this harrowing subject again."

Mrs. Vernon willingly assented, but Sir John returned to it again and again, and closely questioned Alan Desborough on his arrival. The young man declared hotly that Gerald had done all that man could do in such a moment of peril and confusion. He was as brave as a lion. As he knew nothing more, all Sir John's questions could elicit no further intelligence; but the sore wound at the husband's heart bled inwardly, and nothing could assuage his impatient irritability. Nights without rest were followed by silent pacings to and fro by day. The susceptible temperament of the Anglo-Indian was utterly deranged.

Alan tried in vain to amuse and interest his uncle.

Mrs. Vernon's soothing assiduity merely provoked impatience. He would have given all he possessed on earth for the animated though provoking caprices of the young wife whom he had misunderstood, perhaps undervalued, during his busy ambitious career; the serious interests of which she had, in former years, never been invited, or even judged competent to share, beyond taking a ceremonious part in military pomps and pageants.

Lady Desborough's youth and beauty at the time of their marriage had blinded her husband to the strong powers of her mind and heart. He had not availed himself of the tact and cleverness which might have done him good service in many a trying hour, and helped him out of difficulties which a man's straightforward, clear-headed, arbitrary sagacity does not surmount as easily as a woman's finer perceptions and more delicate instinct. He wished his Laura to be admired and to preserve her youthful bloom; not heeding that in the frivolous society of which he had made her, as a mere girl, the feminine leader, her finest and highest qualities were left to run to waste or perish from misuse.

Neither could his loving worship preserve her from suffering and mortification, some part of which was inflicted by himself. The fashion of the day in

the East was to remove children from their mothers, and Sir John had yielded to the persuasions of interfering friends, and insisted on taking Laura's first babies away from her and sending them to be nursed at a station among the hills. Both these infants had perished, and he had never regained the influence which he at first possessed over his young wife.

All pleasure in society was gone, and his jealous love would not allow her to find an availing solace in family affection. He wished to be everything to her, and nearly succeeded in making himself less than nothing ; and, instead of an adoring husband, a cruel injurer. The death of her parents by fever in a remote frontier province, where she was unable to reach them in time to receive their last blessings and counsels, completed the tale of her misery ; just when she had unwillingly parted with Hugh, rather before the usual age at which children born in the East must necessarily be sent to Europe.

The preparations for again expatriating himself were laid aside. Nothing interested him abroad or at home. He could form no plans for the future, he could adopt no present course, while that graceful unforgotten form flitted before him by day and night : —now rising from the waste of waters—now bending over her child's pillow—now upholding in her firm

round white arms the shadowy form of her fragile sister—then sinking with her into a watery grave.

Mrs. Vernon suggested sending for Hugh to comfort him, but Sir John almost fiercely recoiled from the suggestion. “Will the boy bring back his beautiful mother, madam?” he said angrily; “leave the little fellow where he is happiest. I do not wish to hear again from his saucy lips that he does not want me. Children are all very well when their parents or nurses are present to explain their babblings, but they cannot assuage woes like mine—the agonies of remorse. I shall see the little fellow again, of course, just before our departure. Perhaps he had better meet us at Southampton. I do not wish him to come here, neither can I bear to visit The White House. Least of all could I tolerate the sight of Alan’s friend, young Champernowne, and the fair woman he saved from the wreck when my beautiful Laura was left to perish!”

Alan had not confided to his uncle the secret of his fervent attachment to Juliet Champernowne. The name was like a red mantle to a bull, and excited Sir John to fury. He mentioned as seldom as possible his friends at Sunset in the Moor. It was not a propitious moment in which to reveal what he had fully intended to communicate, and Sir

John's plans, in which his own were involved, seemed too unsettled for reliance to be placed on them. Desborough House looked grim and grey and dismal with the November fog creeping over the marshes; the little racing town was quite deserted.

There were no blossoming thickets of may, now on the common—only here and there a tuft of gorse still in bloom, where the little child had been drawn about in his goat-carriage, and the young, bereaved mother had kept him in sight; the nightingales sang no longer in the thickets, and among the dark cedar trees overhanging the moat. Nature wore the black hue of despair; and the heart of the lonely man yearned amid his possessions for the love he had apparently set little store by, when it might have been his own, and turned back obstinately to his dead wife; whilst the woman whose first love had been blighted and scorned, and who, amid heavier and more real woes, had well-nigh forgotten her early sorrows, strove in vain by the sacrifice she was contemplating, and every effort she could make of grateful friendship and sincere regard, to obliterate the ravages of passionate grief and penitential remorse.



CHAPTER XVIII.

"I hear her voice as we kneel in prayer,
I raise my eyes, and, lo ! she is there ;
Husband and child cling in fond embrace
Round her—the Lady of the Place.

"Mirrors reflect her slender form,
In the glowing lamplight, soft and warm,
Above, below, on every side,
Her shadowy image seems to glide."

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

SIR JOHN DESBOROUGH was only preserved from utter despair—perhaps from some desperate action—by a very strong religious principle. Though he seldom spoke on the subject, and never made any professions of piety, he was a sincere and earnest believer in the vital truths of Christianity: and, notwithstanding many infirmities of temper, and the corroding influence of worldly pursuits, he acted up, in all important matters, to his creed. Emily Vernon's simple household devotions, kept up trem-

blingly, but more firmly than most of her habits, found favour in his sight, and reminded him of his early home. As he listened to those softly-breathed petitions and offerings of prayer and praise, with his eyes shaded by his hand, the spirit of his early English home—the spirit of holiness descended on him; the quiet woman's prayers soothed him far more than her arguments and attempts at consolation had done.

Her mention of the message from the sea had sorely disturbed him, but the more he reflected upon it the less ground he could find for hope. He went up to town, and applied personally at the proper quarter for information, and read for the first time the list of the few survivors saved from the ill-fated vessel. Only one of the ship's boats had ridden out the storm. Neither Gerald Champernowne nor Lady Desborough were mentioned amongst those who had been taken on board another vessel on the evening which succeeded the shipwreck; but with a pang of self-reproach when he remembered that he had never inquired respecting her fate, Sir John recognised the name of his young sister-in-law Miss Forester, among those who had been rescued from death. The first tidings of the loss of the ship, and of nearly all her crew and passengers, including his young and beautiful wife, had been almost a death-blow to Sir John. Until

now he had never entertained a doubt that the sisters had perished together. The feeble girl had never interested him. If he thought at all about her, it was only as Laura's sister, and her kindred had never been objects of affection. Now that she was gone from him for ever, his feelings took a softer form, and he resolved—not to see—but to provide handsomely for Helen, if by any possibility he could trace her. He questioned Alan Desborough more closely, though the subject was exquisitely painful, respecting his friend's escape from the sinking ship, but could make no further discoveries. Gerald Champernowne, when he left his English home, had altered his name to George Campion; and, at the very latest moment, in the last boat that left the "Lord Clyde," had found a place, after giving up the one assigned to him in the larger boat to Mrs. Chichester.

Alan knew very little about the two ladies who had been saved from the wreck; and now lived, the one at The White House, the other at Sunset. He was quite sure that he had never heard the name of Forester mentioned either by them or Gerald. Miss Champernowne's pretty little governess was always called "The Signorina." She was as fair as a lily, and extremely delicate-looking, never appearing quite

to have recovered from the horrors of the storm. That subject was prohibited at The White House, and not often mentioned at Sunset. Gerald's reserve with regard to the circumstances connected with his own escape from the shipwreck had been kept up till the present time, in accordance with the promise elicited from him; and Alan, occupied and engrossed with his own attachment for Juliet, had bestowed only casual attention upon the sisters. It had not once struck him that there was anything in the slightest degree mysterious in their position; and he assured his uncle that these ladies were intimate friends of the Admiral and his daughter. Though Miss Champernowne's education was quite finished, the Signorina continued to reside with them as a trusted companion.

"Your description of her brings back to my mind my dear wife's sister," said Sir John, with a deep sigh—"respecting whose fate I am making sedulous inquiries. It would be a melancholy satisfaction if I could succeed in tracing her; but, most probably, she did not long survive the shipwreck and the loss of my poor Laura. Had she lived, of course Helen would have applied to me for assistance."

"I think this young lady's prospects are pretty well secured," said Alan, smiling. "Fragile as she

looks, the Signorina has made a conquest of her gallant deliverer. I am quite sure Gerald means to marry her, and the Admiral will be delighted with the match. By-the-bye, uncle, I may have to ask your sympathy and assistance soon in a little matter of the same kind. I have long wished to tell you of it. Juliet Champernowne, my friend's only sister, has promised to be my wife as soon as I am able to win her father's consent. She does not a bit mind going out to India. Have you any objection to my taking a wife with me ? I shall work all the better in your service."

"Not the slightest objection, my boy," said Sir John kindly, shaking hands with his nephew. "I have always considered that I was bound to make up to you for the injury to your prospects caused by my marriage ; and, though Hugh is my heir, there is enough to make a provision for you and your wife. Tell me more about her."

Alan launched forth immediately into encomiums on Juliet's grace and beauty. His uncle for the time forgot his own troubles, and cordially sympathised with the young lovers. It was arranged that Alan, who was going up to London on business, should, when it was concluded, go down, armed with his uncle's consent and approbation, and liberal proposals

for their settlement in life, and demand Juliet's hand in marriage. Alan said he only hoped that the testy old officer would give his consent as readily to parting with his daughter, as he felt sure he would do to his son's marrying the Signorina.

Mrs. Vernon asked leave to go up to London at the same time, to consult her own relatives respecting the expediency of her accompanying her cousin in the proposed voyage; which, under the influence of Alan Desborough's intended marriage, again was brought on the tapis. Sir John willingly accorded his permission. He wished, he said, for a time, to be alone. When they returned, it would be to settle finally their plans for leaving England.

During his solitary hours Sir John devoted himself partly to business, making arrangements of the most liberal nature for the comfort of Alan Desborough and his future bride; partly to the management of his property and the welfare of his tenants whilst he remained in exile; partly to that most melancholy of all occupations as we advance in life—burning old letters.

He did not mean to remain very long away from England. In a few years he meant to retire upon the pension earned by the labour of a life; and to devote himself entirely to his duties as a father and

an English country gentleman. Desborough House would then be his home, and Hugh's education his chief object in life—if he lived: on that point he felt very doubtful.

Bearing this contingency in mind—looking it firmly in the face—he bravely made preparations for life or death; submitting the issue to a mightier and wiser will than his own: and set his house as well as his thoughts in order. The old letters, after all, were few in number. Most of them were from his mother and Emily Vernon, who had been his correspondent since they were boy and girl together in the old house; where, now a sad and solitary man, he was looking over those records of the past, before consigning them one after another slowly, often reluctantly, to the flames. But who would value them when he was gone? Who would even care to read one of them? It was best with his own hands, which often shook during his self-imposed task, to give them an honourable tomb. Most likely, judging by his present sensations of weakness, he should himself find a grave in a foreign land, and the place where he was born would know him no more.

Among all these packets of letters there were none from his wife. He might in his Indian cabinets have some hurried notes—some meagre, formal letters

put away, but he was not sure even of that. Though vessels had passed the "Lord Clyde" she had not cared to write to him. They had parted in violent anger, after a quarrel occasioned by Sir John's refusal, on the death of his wife's last surviving parent, to give her sister a more than temporary home under their roof. Lady Desborough at once declared that Helen should not return to England, and go among strangers alone; and, in spite of her husband's displeasure, had put in practice her rash resolution to accompany her invalid sister, and rejoin her idolised child.

It was difficult, almost impossible, angry as he felt, for Sir John to disguise his emotion when extracts were read from brief, loving letters, penned in haste on board the Indiaman, and sent to relatives in India by some of the officers belonging to outward-bound ships. The General listened with his usual calm bearing, but with inward impatience and mortification, breathlessly, to some casual mention of Lady Desborough's name. Pride forbade him to confess that he heard *of*—not from her.

They had married in India, during a brief summer excursion which Sir John had made to recruit from official labours; and, though often separated, the young, careless wife had but seldom written to him,

and only on absolutely necessary matters. Here in England, in the home to which he had often longed to bring her,—where, though he constantly in fancy saw her before him, in reality not a trace of his lost Laura met his forlorn gaze,—how glad he would have been now to see the young sisters together; exchanging girlish confidences, singing their Italian love-songs, just the very things which formerly made him jealous and suspicious. He regretted bitterly the loss of even that fragile, faded, washed-out likeness of his brilliant Laura. He would have been glad to give the poor girl a home under his roof, and atone for past unkindness. But no one—not even his child—wanted him. No one cared for him. Alan and Juliet—well, he could make them happy—there was some comfort in that thought! Hugh with his loving, motherly friend in the sweet south—all would be happy, all were independent of him, except in matters of money. After all, he had deserved nothing better than to add to their worldly stores. Sometimes they might bestow on him the calm tribute of gratitude!

He made his will carefully, leaving Alan Desborough to be the guardian of his only son, and acquiescing in Hugh's remaining for the present under the care either of Mrs. Chichester or Mrs. Vernon. A very

handsome provision was made for his nephew, whom he also appointed as his own residuary legatee. In case of Hugh's dying unmarried, Alan would become by law his successor; and, by Sir John's present will, he would also inherit books, plate, jewels, furniture, and other valuable personal property. To his wife's sister Sir John gave a handsome allowance during his life, and ten thousand pounds after his death. For Mrs. Vernon ample provision was made now and ultimately; and a liberal allowance was assigned to the lady who at present kindly superintended Hugh's education. For his old servants definite sums were mentioned, corresponding to the length and faithfulness of their service, and provision was made for keeping up various charities, local and national. Directions for the administration of the estate, and suggestions of various kinds were more informally appended.

Sir John felt easier in his mind when his will was signed and witnessed, and committed to the charge of his lawyers in London. He then set about in real earnest making preparations for departure; and, in so doing, when he saw the regret of his neighbours and tenants on learning that he was about again to become an absentee, learnt that life has duties which are never satisfactorily performed by a deputy, and that his English home had still claims upon him.



CHAPTER XIX.

"Welcome, wild North-easter !
O'er the German foam,
O'er the Danish moorlands,
From thy frozen home.

Fill the lake with wild-fowl,
Fill the marsh with snipe,
While on dreary moorlands
Lonely curlew pipe.
Through the black fir forest
Thunder harsh and dry,
Shattering down the snow-flakes
Off the curdled sky.

Come as came our fathers,
Heralded by thee,
Conquering and to conquer,
Lords of land and sea."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

THE easterly wind was tearing across the Cambridgeshire heath, snapping off branches of trees like dead twigs, and moaning round the corners of the old house in weird melancholy gusts. Since the news of

the shipwreck had jarred nerves previously not susceptible to changes of wind and weather, Sir John had been keenly alive to atmospheric influences. He looked round the empty, formal room with a shudder, closed the book he was trying to read, and commenced walking slowly up and down.

He had borne his bereavement, as the phrase is commonly used, like a man: which, in his case and many another, means that it had eaten into his heart, undermined his health, and shattered his nervous system, without making much outward difference at first in manner or person. But it told upon him now. The thin upright form was beginning to stoop, the lines of care and thought had deepened and darkened, his black hair was streaked with grey. His young, handsome wife, had she been living, would perhaps scarcely have known him.

Though there had been a great disparity of years between them, Sir John had been a fine-looking and very distinguished person when he married Laura Forester. His attentions had greatly flattered the seventeen-year-old beauty; who had come up from a frontier station, where her father held an official position, to stay with friends residing in the City of Palaces, on the eve of one of those military displays of pageantry so common and so effective in India.

It gratified her youthful vanity to have the hero of the hour at her feet. Sir John's conquest had been an easy one. He could see her now, as he had seen her for the first time at the ovation prepared for his reception on his return from a triumphant campaign in the north-western provinces, among a bevy of young girls who presented him with an address and laurel-wreath. Her first glance had conquered the triumphant General, and he made his advances with military adroitness and promptitude. That night she was the queen of the ball-room. He vowed in his heart that he would win her, and ere long he succeeded.

At first they were very happy. He could look back on many pleasant hours, days, weeks, even months spent together; and upon intervals of, on his part, anxious painful separation followed by blissful reunion. Sir John sighed deeply: he did not wish to pursue further that train of thought after disunion and jealousy had broken the illusion, as he afterwards deemed it, that his gay young wife loved him.

He had not been prepared for the terrible revival of sorrow which had come over him, wave after wave, in England. The arduous duties of his profession had quieted his first outbreak of grief. He had thrown himself heart and soul into his work,

and circumstances had arisen which all his energies were required to meet. This was his first season of rest.

What a misnomer it seemed. Could he ever be at rest again? Would that lovely figure, that brilliant face, never cease to haunt him—that glorious voice always ring in his ears? He heard it in church, mingling with the tones of the splendid organ; which he had given in memory of his Laura to his native village, when the Rector wrote and asked him for a contribution. Would it ring on for ever?

Sir John paused suddenly in his measured, mournful walk, as a louder gust than usual, mingled with hail, swept past the windows, threatening mischief. He drew back the heavy curtains, unbarred the shutters, and looked forth upon the stormy night. Black clouds overhung the lofty cedars; but the moon, now and again, as the showers passed off, shone out, silverying their topmost edges and the tossing branches of the trees. Then the black masses gathered over her, one after another, and all was darkness.

In one of these momentary intervals of brightness Sir John fancied that he heard the sound of wheels approaching the mansion; and the far-off tinkle of a bell, not coming from the front of the house, but from the offices at the back. He wondered who

could have been abroad in such weather; but, after listening and hearing no further sound, decided that he must have been mistaken. The rustling of the leaves, the sighing of the wind, as it swept through the tops of the stone-pines, most likely deceived him. There was no road near except through the park. He was not expecting Alan or Mrs. Vernon back at present, and he believed that the domestics had been long in their beds. He had kept up his mother's and Emily Vernon's practice of having the servants in for family prayers, and the butler, after respectfully inquiring whether his master required anything farther, had followed the domestic phalanx. To the best of his belief he was the only person in the house not yet gone to rest.

Alas, there was for him no repose—it was utterly useless to seek it. The wild night winds howling round the building, and among the cedars and pines, tossing the branches of the old elms, shuddering among the poplars, roaring down the chimneys, seemed like the rushing of the storm, in which the homeward-bound ship, with its precious freight, had gone down; those solemn sounds, like groans and cries of the dying, reproaches and life-long agonised wailing for their loss. Sir John turned from the window, after closing the shutters

and curtains with an impatient hand. He had reached the centre of the room, and was standing, buried in thought, by the table, on which a lamp burned steadily, when a terrific blast mingled with thunder rolled over the house. A distant door closed with a heavy noise, and that of the room in which he was keeping solitary watch, flew open. Footsteps, not hurried as if to announce disaster caused by the storm, but slow and unequal, were heard in the passage.

The hand resting on the oaken table clenched convulsively. The man reared his tall form and listened attentively; while a kind of horror, hitherto unknown, made his face, rigidly set, white as death.

“Laura,” he said, with a gasp, as though death were at hand, “are you come to fetch me?”

The slow footfall stopped suddenly.

A bitter feeling of disappointment succeeded Sir John’s involuntary access of horror. He could not move or speak. All his senses seemed clouded.

Suddenly a vision, a flash of light, seemed to enter and fill the room. Its dreary corners were all illuminated—from floor to ceiling an unutterable, previously unimaginable glory streamed in, flooding the innermost recesses of the library, and lighting up the carved book-shelves and old oaken furniture. Sir John felt his senses revive with the sense of danger, of some

coming crisis, and his powers of motion return. Was it the storm that had kindled that strange radiance? Had he been struck by lightning which had set the old house on fire? or was it Heaven—the home of his dead wife—suddenly opening before him? A hot flush mounted to his brows, banishing the cold death-like hues, the heavy shadows, which had for a few moments made his face ghastly. Youth for one golden instant came back. Years seemed to fall from his bowed shoulders. His heart beat with the pulses that had bounded so quickly when Laura first laid her girlish hand in his. Could he be dreaming, or was it really her dear hand, warm and living, that met his grasp? Her lips, loving and trembling, pressed on his brow, which had brought back life and colour? Could he have passed into another world? or was it Laura—his wife—his only earthly love who stood beside him?

The cloak had fallen from her shoulders. Her hat with its drooping feathers lay on the ground. Her tall, fine form leant tenderly towards him, her warm hands were in his. It was, it must be, Laura—not as he had thought of her pale altered semblance, the cruel sport of the wild waves and drifts of the Atlantic, but living, moving, breathing—nay, more, loving, smiling, entreating for love in return, and forgiveness

by her penitent caresses—who stood revealed in the lamplight, close beside him !

Sir John actually trembled as he drew her towards him, fearing lest that fair form would melt away like a shape in a dream ; but the softly-curved woman's shape was real,—the voice which at last broke upon his ears, clear as an angel's whisper, was no spiritual echo from another world ! He scarcely realised the meaning of those sweet words. All that he knew and felt was that it was Laura who spoke to him—that her kisses were still warm on his forehead —his hands close clasped in hers—and that gentle whisperings of love and reconciliation were murmured in his ear. Though the winds went on their way louder than before, they passed by unheard. The old house might almost have fallen without rousing the pair who stood entranced in that antique library ; with the warm glow of lamplight falling on their faces, without as yet revealing to either of them any change for the worse wrought by sorrow. The husband and wife seemed to each other glorified, after their long separation, during which the dread angel of death had stood between them. Laura, if she noticed the silvery threads in her husband's dark hair, felt as if they were cords drawing them together. The darker lines gave dignity to the countenance ; the leaning atti-

tude dispelled all formality. She was not changed;—lovelier than ever, grander yet gentler, with tears of penitence softening her bright eyes, and womanly tenderness mellowing her girlish charms, no wonder if her entranced bewildered husband, who had never ceased to be her lover, thought that Heaven in its mercy had sent an angel to comfort him in his desolation; and that he must hold her tightly clasped for fear lest she might again take flight.

But as time passed on—even after the lapse of only a very brief space, which seemed longer than the dull years which had fled like a dream—Sir John's practical intellect reasserted itself. He felt and knew as a blessed certainty that, through some mysterious, mystical, providential train of circumstances, his wife, living and loving, was restored to him. Without a word of question or reproach he took her tenderly to his heart; and, with one impulse, before entering upon any tedious explanation, the husband and wife knelt down and thanked God for being spared to each other, and reunited.





CHAPTER XX.

Yes—let our earthly prospects still
Be crossed by change of good or ill ;
Let cloud and mist the future veil,
And tempests fright and fears assail ;
But let me, midst Thy chastenings, know
One quiet place of rest below.

R. M. K.

VERY little explanation sufficed to clear up all the long-standing difficulties which at one time appeared to be insurmountable barriers in the way of a reconciliation between husband and wife. What more could Sir John desire when Laura, more beautiful and blooming than ever, voluntarily resumed her place in his establishment ? Both shrank from useless recriminations, and were ready to take the blame of their unhappy separation to themselves.

It was like a second honeymoon to find themselves alone together in the old English mansion, where there was little to remind them of the past ; and yet

after a time neither of them could fail to trace, even in acts of mutual kindness and consideration, a consciousness of former shortcomings and derelictions from duty. In every white hair which streaked Sir John's sable tresses, in every deepened line in his countenance, in the stoop of his thin figure, Laura read her own condemnation ; and yet never before had she so much admired her manly husband. Never, until she saw how much he regretted her loss, had she so truly loved him. She would not admit, even to herself, that jealousy had quickened her perceptions ; and that it was the possibility of losing her place in his heart and home that first taught her how much she valued his faithful affection.

If care had set less painful marks in her fair face, in quiet moments Sir John could not help seeing it had still left upon her some traces of anxiety and responsibility. Laura, though more beautiful, looked older and more matronly than of yore. Her manner was softer, her voice had chords which told of suffering. While watching unaided over her little children she had become a graver, wiser woman. Their mother even did not want Hugh and Violet at present. Sir John scarcely bestowed a thought upon the children, though he remembered with emotion the blue-eyed infant who had smiled up in his face at The White

House. The little ones were safe and happy with their nurse, under the superintendence of the Signorina and Juliet. During their first days of reunion the husband and wife were all in all to each other. Neither of them wished to recall that a different state of feeling had ever existed between them.

Nor was it necessary to revive the vexing question, which has embittered many a household so situated, of separation, either between husband and wife or from their children. Sir John remembered, with a sigh of relief, that his year of leave had yet to run. He had been in such a state of indecision that he had not thrown up his furlough. He wrote at once to Alan, desiring him to take no steps until they met again, in regard to the business matters and preparations which had taken him to London; as the sudden discovery that Lady Desborough had survived the shipwreck entirely altered all his uncle's plans and prospects. Sir John had no present intention of leaving England; nor should he require Mrs. Vernon's kind self-sacrifice, in consenting to accompany him to India, to be carried into effect. Possibly he might ask her to resume her charge of his little son, if Lady Desborough's health allowed her to return with him to the East; but this must be left for future consideration.

"Why do you say that, John ? I am not going to part from you again," said a soft voice close at his ear, while a hand was laid fondly on his arm. "God will provide for the little ones, or at least for Hugh, if we cannot take him out with us. The baby will derive no harm from a hot climate, and my health has never been delicate. Children find friends always, but you have never been able to replace me. If I have learnt nothing else from my trials, I know that a wife should place no object on earth in comparison with her husband."

Sir John, with old-fashioned chivalrous courtesy, raised to his lips the soft hand laid on his arm, and pushed aside the letter he was writing.

"We can settle that hereafter," he said ; "my furlough has yet to run. Perhaps I may give up returning to India altogether, sooner than separate you from our children."

Lady Desborough took the pen from his hand and finished the letter.

"We are too happy to think or write about India at present, Alan. You must come and see us here at Desborough House, and give me the testimonial of merit which you once promised."

"No need of that," Sir John, who had risen, and was in his turn looking down and reading the letter

over her shoulder, said with a smile ; " Alan was never tired of praising you. But we shall scarcely get him here again at present. What must we do to make up for his disappointment at losing the office of secretary ? He has fallen desperately in love with Miss Champernowne, and was vain enough to suppose she would go out with him to India. The Admiral's son, he declares, wants to marry your sister. Is this true, Laura ? "

There was a faint tone of anxiety in the question which Laura's quick ear detected. Her cheek flushed.

" Yes, I think he loves Helen. He saved her life."

" Do not speak of it," said Sir John, with a shudder. " Alan told me that young Champernowne gave his place in the boat to *you*. Was this the fact ? "

Lady Desborough looked up frankly in her husband's face.

" Yes, I think he liked me best then, John ; he did not know that I was married. There was a mistake made when we went on board. The invalid sister was called Lady Desborough, and I jestingly encouraged it. It was very foolish ; but I enjoyed passing for a girl, and Mr. Campion, as he called himself—he was only a steerage passenger—used

sometimes to come and talk to me. I am telling you the whole truth, John, and it makes me feel very much ashamed of myself. When the ship struck, in the dreadful confusion which ensued, all distinctions of rank and class were forgotten. He came to me, and encouraged me to take that fearful leap into the boat. I believe he gave up his own place, his one chance of life, to save me. The men wanted another rower, but he stood aside ; he would not follow. He had told me that he would bring my sister, or I should not have left the ship ; but it was too late. I saw him looking after us calmly from the deck, where we left him and all on board to perish, without a hope of escape."

"Do not tell me more, Laura," said her husband, hoarsely ; "I cannot bear it."

"When I saw him again," Lady Desborough continued in an altered tone, "everything was quite changed. "He scarcely looked at me. I had nothing on that score with which to reproach myself. Helen, whom he had also saved, had entirely captivated him. He recognised us immediately ; but, at my request, he kept our secret. Admiral Champernowne, our most kind friend, only knows us as two poor, friendless ladies of foreign parentage. Helen is Miss Champernowne's companion, now she has ceased to be her

governess. It was Gerald who helped me to come here; who by his open-hearted, high-minded representations roused in me the sense of wrong-doing, and gave me courage to act rightly. He alone knew my real name and station; and he set before me the falseness of my position, and its fatal insecurity. Believe me, neither of us have a truer friend than the steerage-passenger who gave his place to me in the first boat that left the ship's side."

Lady Desborough's voice failed her. Sir John tenderly embraced and soothed her. It was the last time for many weeks that either of them mentioned the fate of the homeward-bound vessel. The strong reaction of feeling was too great to be borne with impunity, and the young wife was soon obliged to exercise again the skill which she had displayed as a nurse once before at Desborough House. For several weeks Sir John was confined to his bed, and at one time danger was apprehended; but the worst symptoms passed off, and were followed by a gradual but very tedious recovery. During his illness and convalescence Laura never quitted him; every remedy was taken from her hand, and when, at last, the good doctor who had attended Hugh pronounced his father not to be in further need of his professional services, he added feelingly:

"Under Providence, Sir John, you owe your life to your good young wife's excellent nursing."

Desborough House was pronounced by the physicians to be too cold a residence in winter for an invalid accustomed to the climate of India; and as soon as his strength was sufficiently restored for Sir John to undertake the long journey, the Cambridgeshire mansion was left in the care of servants, while the husband and wife travelled southward by easy stages. The White House, where the children had remained under the charge of their aunt and nurse, was made ready for the reception of their parents; who had resolved to pass the winter in the immediate neighbourhood of Admiral Champernowne, Gerald, and Juliet.





CHAPTER XXI.

“ ‘Tis thus we rise by sitting,
Thro’ darkness reach our day,
Our own ways hourly losing
To find the eternal way.

“ ‘Tis by defeat we conquer,
Grow rich by growing poor,
And from our largest givings
We draw our fullest store.

“ Then let the blossoms perish,
And let the fragrance go;
All the surer and the larger
Is the harvest we shall know.

“ All the sweeter and the louder
Our song of harvest-home,
When earth’s ripe autumn smileth,
And the reaping-day has come.”

THE GAIN OF LOSS.

Not a single day had passed since Lady Desborough’s departure without bringing Admiral Champernowne at the same hour to see the children and the Signo-

rina. If Gerald was as frequent a visitor he took another period of the day, and never interfered with his father. Juliet sometimes accompanied one, sometimes the other.

All mystery had vanished. Helen had obtained her sister's permission, before they parted, to reveal her real name and position. The romantic story had ceased to be a nine-days' wonder, and the Admiral was reconciled to the deception. It was a great relief to him that their handsome neighbour was under the protection of her own lawful husband; and that her extraordinary partiality for Cambridgeshire, the ugliest county in England in Admiral Champernowne's estimation, and its heaths swept by his mortal enemy, the easterly wind, was at last accounted for.

Of course Sir John Desborough would bring his wife back to The White House for the winter. A man used to a hot climate could not live on the top of Newmarket Heath. As for Gerald's not wishing to let the cottage, as he had one day said, it was perfect nonsense. Surely Sunset in the Moor was big enough for one family, even if he had brought back a wife and half a dozen children. The old nurseries and schoolroom, in spite of their easterly aspect, were spacious and comfortable.

Gerald, at all events, made no objection to extending his tenant's term of occupation through the winter months, when Lady Desborough made it her especial request that he would allow them to occupy their sunny quarters in the orchard for some time longer. Sir John's future plans were unsettled, but his health required care and warmer breezes than prevailed at present in the Eastern Counties.

Though happiness is a great restorer of health, Sir John continued to feel the effects of his illness and previous trials long after their bitterness was forgotten. Laura felt her penitence redoubled by the signs of alteration in her husband's person. Her heart smote her as he leant on her arm and claimed the help which was always lovingly accorded. In his days of unbroken health and strength, his wife had never loved him as she did now; when, to other eyes, the disparity between them had fearfully increased. She was ready to give up everything—to leave her children—sooner than interfere with his inclinations and injure his prospects; but, after a short time, Sir John himself began to feel sure that he should never be able to resume the active duties of his profession, and sent in his resignation of the high military post which he had honourably occupied, recommending his nephew as secretary to his suc-

cessor in office ; a request which was immediately granted.

Alan Desborough came down to The White House immediately, to thank his uncle for thus securing his future prospects. He had not revealed his affection for Juliet, nor asked her father's consent to their marriage, whilst uncertain what might be the General's future plans. Now that his own fate in life was so propitiously settled, he should try whether he had a chance of taking a bride out with him to India.

"Out of the question, my dear sir, quite out of the question!" was the Admiral's first angry response, as he walked up and down the gloomy old library in a passion, which he had much difficulty in keeping down. "Juliet is a mere child—scarcely out of the schoolroom ! Upon my word, I must say this is a very ungrateful return for the welcome which I was delighted to give you as Gerald's friend and travelling-companion. I hope you have not put ridiculous ideas of love and marriage into my young daughter's head. Her education is far from complete. I shall send her to a finishing school in London or Brighton for the next two years."

"Pardon me if I venture to say that Miss Charnowne in my eyes is perfect," said her lover

ardently. " You would not surely wish to alter her charming manners—her divine simplicity——"

" Well, I am not sure about that," said the Admiral. " I hope Juliet has not been deceiving me—that she is as simple and childlike as she certainly looks. Has she given you any encouragement to proffer this extraordinary—this most unexpected request? Forgive me if I do not at this moment feel quite as sensible of the honour you are doing us as I ought to be, but I confess you have taken me by surprise. Has my daughter, I repeat, given you any reason to believe that she would be willing to leave me—to go out with you to that abominable oven, Calcutta? I declare it was only the other day she was crying in her nursery, over her story-book history of the horrors of the Black Hole!"

" Miss Champernowne has no unreasonable, child-like notions on that or any other subject," said Alan, while the Admiral glared at him like a bear or a lion in danger of being robbed of his cubs. " I venture to hope that Juliet is not entirely adverse to the proposal for her hand which I have made to you."

" Conceited young puppy!" rose to the Admiral's lips; but Alan's firm though respectful bearing checked its utterance. " You think that Juliet—I should prefer your calling my daughter Miss Champernowne

—is not indifferent to your merits—perhaps not—anything of Gerald's finds favour with his sister—his horse, his dog, even his gun and fishing-rods, The White House in the orchard—why not his friend?—anything else is quite preposterous. If she were to tell me to the contrary I should say she did not know her own mind, and send her back to her school-room. This mischief all comes from the Signorina's talking of leaving us—I knew it was an irreparable misfortune—and Gerald's return. He is a most unlucky fellow. I knew there would be no peace in the house after he came back to it!"

Alan turned white with anger, but his manner was still perfectly respectful; his tone low and calm.

"Do not blame Gerald," he said, "for what is my fault; and, perhaps, your daughter's. Few men could see her, as I have done, in her own home without loving her. Admiral Champernowne, your daughter is a child no longer. You cannot hope to keep her with you. I am sorry to seem ungrateful, pertinacious, but I have her rights to defend as well as my own. If Juliet, let me call her so once more, loves me, will you consent, at some future time it may be—I can wait, but I will not relinquish hope, except at her bidding—to give her to me?"

"No," said the Admiral, in a voice like thunder.
"Neither now nor ever."

Alan Desborough rose from his chair. "You will permit me to see Miss Champernowne? Let it be in your presence, if you like."

"Certainly not," said the Admiral passionately. "I know the result of such meetings. Juliet is a child in the eyes of the law and of all people of sense. You must take this answer as final. I will not have her mind disturbed by love nonsense for the next three years at least. If you choose to be content to speak to her then, I cannot help it; but you shall not see her again now with my permission. I advise you to think no more about my daughter."

Alan stood irresolute, his face pale and agitated.

"I do not think that you are acting fairly or kindly by either of us, Admiral Champernowne. My prospects are not despicable. Will you allow my uncle, Sir John Desborough, to explain his intentions, and what my position, owing to his kindness, will be?"

"Let him manage his own affairs," growled the Admiral testily. "His handsome wife has ten times over a better head for business than he has, and is much more my friend. But I do not wish either of them to interfere. I should quarrel with any man or

woman who asked me to let my daughter go to India. Look how their happiness is marred by the climate—causing separation between parent and child, husband and wife—worse, even, than the easterly wind. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-morning."

The choleric old naval officer put out his hand. In his heart he was touched by Alan Desborough's strong manifestation of feeling, and firm, manly bearing. The young man did not seem to perceive his intention ; and, with a low bow, without speaking, left the room. Admiral Champernowne paced the floor, at first grimly exultant over his victory, then somewhat ashamed of the unseemly temper which he was conscious he had betrayed—finally repentant for the pain he had inflicted on the disappointed young lover.

He did not feel quite easy respecting his daughter, though he persisted in regarding her as much too young to dream of love and marriage. Alan's words, conveying a decided, though not arrogant conviction that Juliet was not indifferent to his suit, lingered in her father's ears. After half an hour's cogitation, during which his anger, having no fresh fuel to feed it, died away, he determined to go and look for the child. He did not mean to tell her of Alan's

proposals, but he wished to sound the depths of her heart. A qualm of remorse shot through his own, as he took her mother's picture out of the secret drawer of his writing-table, and for a few silent, thoughtful moments gazed at it. He did not forget, though he would not for worlds have mentioned it, that, when he married her she was exactly the same age as his own young daughter. The dark, passionate eyes seemed to ask him what would *she* have done, what would have been *his own* fate, if their union had been imperatively, without just reason, forbidden ? It was a demand which he could not answer. He shut up and locked the bureau, and quitted the library. Some unaccountable instinct, or, as the Admiral himself always said, more reverentially, Providence, directed his steps to the old, now generally disused, schoolroom. He was not likely to find his daughter there, for Juliet was still young enough to be proud of her emancipation from lessons, and seldom now went near her old haunts. On this occasion there was no one in the schoolroom but the Signorina ; sitting mournfully behind a great pile of books, and looking very much as if she were crying over them.

"My dear," said the Admiral, coming close up to her, and taking her hand in his, "you are the very

person I wished to see. But—is anything the matter?"

His ill-temper had quite vanished at sight of her. He looked kindness personified.

"No—oh no. It is only the sight of this dear old room—of my books," faltered Helen. "I cannot bear to take them away."

"Then why do you not leave them in their places?" said the Admiral, quietly replacing the volumes. "I don't know whether the books are yours or mine; but if there is one thing I dislike more than another, it is to see unsightly gaps in my book-shelves. It is like missing an accustomed face at dinner and breakfast, as I have so often done lately. My dear, when are you going to settle among us quietly again? Your sister, now she has her husband and children with her at The White House, can surely not require so much of your society."

Helen's tears now fell in earnest. "Sir John Desborough and Laura wish me to live with them altogether. He is very kind, but a little haughty. I think he does not like my being dependent on any one excepting himself; and, since he refused to receive me as an inmate of my sister's house, after our parent's death, I have been particularly unwilling to interfere with his domestic arrangements. My sister,

however, says that the time has come when I ought to give up my happy home here, and take up my abode at The White House."

"It is for you to decide that question," said the Admiral gravely. "Your sister has her own husband to manage, and no doubt wishes every one to fall in with his fancies; but if you prefer humouring and humanising a crusty old fellow like me, and keeping order in my household, instead of disturbing their newly regained harmony, I do not see that either of them have any business to cross your wishes. Upon my word," he exclaimed, remembering his own recent vexation, "everybody and everything to-day is conspiring to put me out of sorts. What am I to do with Juliet, if you forsake me?"

"Miss Champernowne's education is quite finished," said the young ci-devant governess demurely. "I am afraid I have no excuse for lingering now that she is old enough to preside over your household."

"Not a bit of it; Juliet is a mere chit, a child still," said the Admiral impatiently. "If she were older she would want to leave me—at least so the impertinent young jackanapes maintains to whom I have just given his congé in the library."

Helen looked at him with anxiety.

"Have you spoken to Juliet? Indeed, Admiral

Champernowne, she is old enough to have an opinion, and to hold to it, though I am sure she would not act disobediently. Hearts cannot be controlled like children's naughty whims and habits."

"What, are you too against me," said the old officer disconsolately. "Come, let us make a bargain. If Juliet really wants to marry this young hero, some time hence, I mean—I am not going to let her out of leading-strings at present—but suppose I were to give them a little hope for some future day, would you promise not to desert us; to stay at Sunset now, and help me to look after this wayward child, and when she deserts me, to take her place?"

A flood of crimson rushed into the Signorina's face. The Admiral looked at her scrutinisingly.

"Poor little dear!" he said affectionately. "Don't be frightened. I am not making you an offer of marriage. There is no need to blush so becomingly. All I want is to make sure that, with all this wooing and wedding, I am not left entirely in the lurch. As for Gerald, I place no sort of dependence on him. He may be here to-day and gone to-morrow. If he married, ten to one he would not care to live with me, or his wife might not like it; nor I, for that matter, unless he married the person I wish him to select. With you it is different. I know you and like you,

and I think you like me ; we suit each other exactly. Will you promise to stay at Sunset, and keep house for me—well, since you are so scrupulous, suppose we say if my son and heir has no objection ?”

“No, I cannot make so rash a promise,” said Helen. “I will not fetter my own future or yours. Circumstances might arise which would prevent my keeping it, or lead you to repent having exacted it from me.”

“I do not see what they could be,” said the Admiral. “I am quite sure there will never be peace in this house if you leave us. Shall I bring Gerald to plead for me, to convince you that your place can never be filled satisfactorily for either of us if you let that domineering Indian brother-in-law of yours carry you away.”

“No, no : there is no necessity,” said Helen faintly. “Mr. Champernowne is very kind. He does not want me to leave Sunset. Of course I am my own mistress ; as Sir John did not offer me a home in India when I needed one sorely, I am not bound to accept benefits from him now ; but for Laura’s sake I do not wish to offend him.”

“I am glad you have a spirit of your own ; and know how to assert it, gentle as you look, at proper times and seasons,” said the Admiral. “Depend upon it, your sister and her husband are much better left

to themselves. Don't dare to begin packing your books again without giving me proper notice of your intentions: I shall take it very ill of you if you act so inconsiderately. Will you, at any rate, give me this promise?"

Helen yielded gracefully to this reasonable requisition, and obediently put the shelves in order.

"At present," continued the Admiral gravely, "remember that you are under an engagement to remain with me; and that it would seriously inconvenience my daughter and myself to part with you. You can say that you mentioned the subject, and tried to give in your portfolio of office, but that, until a new ministry is formed—of which at present I see no prospect—you cannot be spared or allowed to lay down the labour of office. Will this satisfy your sister and Sir John Desborough, or shall I speak to them?"

"I am under far too many obligations to hesitate, if you really require my poor services," said Helen, her eyes again filling with tears. "To-morrow I shall establish myself here permanently, in this old schoolroom which Juliet has abandoned, and look over the housekeeping books as I used to do."

"Yes, you can do that, if you like, to-morrow; anything to keep you with us," said her partial

friend. "But I do not think you will be suffered to remain long in this dingy retreat. I never noticed before how shabby the old furniture had become. My dear, I give you carte blanche to re-furnish this room, and the adjoining one, if you can put up with this easterly aspect; and I make them over entirely for your future use. Only mind, I mean what I say, and I hate delay. Let me *never* see those old, faded hangings and these ink-marked schoolroom table-covers again. Make a clean sweep of all the old rubbish, and have everything fair and bright, like yourself, about you."

Helen promised obedience; and the Admiral, satisfied with the victory he had won, went in search of Juliet, who was, however, not to be found. The fact was, Alan, on his disconsolate way home, had fallen in with her, and beguiled her to take one last despairing walk among the laurels by the deep ponds. The Admiral had shown no mercy; and, consequently, the young lovers argued, he deserved no consideration. Had he been kind, or even reasonable, Alan would have thought it wrong to lead his daughter into any clandestine proceedings; but this seemed to be their last chance of meeting before his departure. Juliet would not oppose her father's wishes that no engagement should be entered into;

but both were thoroughly resolved to be faithful to each other, in spite of time and absence; and they trusted that his obdurate resolutions might be softened by their mutual constancy.





CHAPTER XXII.

"Life, too, has like the earth, its desert places,
 Oft times of hopeless length and very drear ;
Ungladdened by the sight of kindly faces,
 Where grief looks round and finds no solace near.
And such are good : they teach us not to fear,
 And serve to strengthen hundredfold our faith
In God's great mercy. Thus His love doth cheer
Like waters in the desert ; and His breath
Refreshes our poor hearts, faint even unto death."

CHARLES BONER.

LIKE most choleric persons, Admiral Champernowne felt heartily ashamed of his passion when its violence had subsided. He called at The White House, fully intending to apologise to Alan Desborough for his impetuosity, but the young man had gone up to town by the first train that morning.

Perhaps his absence served the cause of the young lover better than his presence could have done. The great laurels overhanging the smooth dark fish-ponds told no tale of the tender farewell interview, nor of

the unspoken vows of constancy, silently undertaken beneath their mournful branches. The Admiral felt himself to have been carried away beyond the bounds of courtesy; and chafed under the disappointment of being unable to express his regret for having, in his utter astonishment, transgressed the rules of good breeding.

The old officer perceived that Sir John Desborough received him in a somewhat less friendly manner than usual. He felt at a loss to know whether Alan had confided his intention of proposing for Juliet to his uncle. A word suddenly enlightened him. His nephew's returning at all to The White House was doubtful, Sir John said, in answer to his inquiries. He had met with a sore disappointment, and young men were, unfortunately, hasty.

"Not so bad as old ones," murmured the Admiral,—"no fool like—I beg your pardon, Sir John. I refer to myself, and to my naturally hasty temper, which is too apt to get the better of me. If people would only wait a little, as the Signorina does—not hurry me—the blasts blow over; but as you say, young men as well as old ones are impetuous; we must forget and forgive. For my part I am always ready to say I was wrong, when the hot fit is over.

Will you say this to Mr. Desborough? I candidly confess he put me in a rage yesterday."

"No man can do more than say he is sorry for having given offence," said Sir John quietly. "Do you wish me to convey more than the simple apology for over-hastiness, to my nephew? I am really and deeply sorry for his utter disappointment. Of course, you know best with regard to Miss Champernowne, but I have a very high opinion of Alan. Would it not be as well to reconsider the matter?"

The Admiral coloured. His temper again tried to master him, but he kept it down. "No, no; Juliet is too young to marry, and I hate long engagements. I am sorry that I offended your nephew, Sir John; and as we are not likely to meet, I shall be obliged by your saying so to him. That is all."

"Very well," said Sir John coolly. "I shall write to him to-morrow. Now, with regard to another matter, Admiral Champernowne, on which I wanted very much to speak to you. Deeply sensible, as my wife and I are of your great kindness to Helen, we cannot, of course, suffer her to retain the position she has held, most happily I am bound to say, under your roof, for the last two years. Henceforward I regard her as my own as well as Lady Desborough's

sister; and we wish her to make her home, here or at Desborough House, with us."

"Have you spoken to Miss Forester about this, since I saw her yesterday?" replied the Admiral. "She made no complaint then of my temper, or of our treatment of her at Sunset. Sir John, I don't think that the Signorina—I cannot help calling her by the old name—wishes to leave us."

"I have not seen Miss Forester this morning. My invalid habits still prevent my breakfasting with the family. Indeed, I am not sure that she has yet returned home," said Sir John, with some surprise. "But it is impossible—you must see it in the same light, my dear sir, much as I regret having to grieve you, and Lady Desborough is quite of the same opinion with myself—that our sister should remain at Sunset as a sort of companion—an honoured one I know—but still a companion or housekeeper. Miss Champernowne no longer needs a governess."

The Admiral became angry, and a little confused. He tried to recollect the exact terms of his agreement with Helen. Had her promise to remain at Sunset been conditional on his dealing leniently with Alan and Juliet, or not? He could not exactly remember.

"Helen is my good angel," he said abruptly. "If

she leaves me, I shall go back to my old ways; perhaps be a greater brute than ever; and, mark me, Sir John, in spite of my quick temper, she loves me and all of us. She does not wish to leave Sunset, and she is her own mistress, past one and twenty—not a child, like my Juliet."

"Of course, of course," said Sir John, himself now in a fair way to lose his temper, and half inclined to believe that his wife's family were always destined to be a calamity. "Miss Forester is of age, and her own mistress in the eye of the law; but family ties have a claim on us all, and she is not a person likely to regard these considerations lightly. Perhaps it will be best for Lady Desborough to speak to her sister."

"Yes, she can say what she likes, but Helen will not desert us. Remember, Sir John, that it is neither as my daughter's companion, nor as my housekeeper, that I wish to keep Helen at Sunset. If she takes the course I wish her to adopt she will become my child—the daughter of my house. No one need trouble themselves further about her. She and Juliet shall share and share alike."

"This is a very generous proposal, Admiral Charnernowne," said Sir John, more warmly. "Of course it merits respectful consideration and gratitude.

I will, with your permission, submit it to my wife and sister, and let you know the result."

The Admiral rose immediately; with difficulty restraining the words, "Pompous old prig! I wish you would always leave your wife to talk to me," which trembled on his lips. Sir John bowed him out courteously; but, though neighbours, the two men were never likely to be intimate friends.

Helen meanwhile, without any ceremonious announcement of her intentions even to her sister, for her plans were still somewhat indefinite, had, after breakfast, re-established herself in the old school-room. It pleased her greatly to think that this room and the one adjoining it were to be her own; and she amused herself with thinking how she would have them fitted up. At present she had not taken Juliet into her counsels. The young girl was wandering alone, disconsolately, by the fish-ponds, recalling tender words spoken there yesterday.

Gerald Champernowne had been in London for the last week, having been requested to make certain communications respecting the shipwreck, of which he was now known to have been the last witness and survivor. His return was not expected immediately; and, safe as she deemed herself from intrusion, for she knew that the Admiral was gone down to the

house in the valley, Helen unlocked the cabinet on the right-hand side of the fireplace which contained what Juliet called “her treasures,” and stood gazing upon them mournfully.

There she had laid by all the relics connected with the shipwreck, and her salvation from its horrors. The message from the sea, given to her by her sister, occupied a prominent place. Next to it was a little prayer-book, which she had carried in her bosom, and the hooded cape of the seaman which Gerald had thrown over her; a tiny purse, netted by her sister, which had contained her scanty store of money; and a locket, the only ornament of value which she possessed, containing a miniature portrait of her mother. How mercifully had she been preserved! And now the lines had truly fallen to her in pleasant places, after she had been lifted from those troubled waters. Helen fully relied on the good old Admiral's word. She knew that he would treat her as a daughter. Involuntarily she sank on her knees and thanked God for all His goodness—for her peaceful home—for unnumbered blessings.

The girl rose hastily and busied herself with the arrangement of her shelves; without turning round, for she had tears in her eyes, when the door opened. She fancied it must be Juliet come back from her

solitary ramble, but a heavier, more manly footstep crossed the floor and stopped beside her.

"Do not close that door. Let me look at our treasures. You do not know that I had a hasty glimpse of them once before; but Juliet said it was treason, and scarcely allowed me to do more than glance at these relics," said Gerald; laying his hand on Helen's and preventing her shutting up the cabinet. "They are my treasures as well as yours—our memories are the same. It does a man good to be reminded how in the midst of life, with manhood's pulses beating, we are in death; and truly we *did* pass through its dark shadows together."

Helen did not gainsay his wish or withdraw her hand. For several minutes they stood silently gazing together at that weird treasure—their only salvage from the wreck.

"Was it all, Helen?" said Gerald, as some few trembling words to that effect escaped her lips. "Did we bring away *nothing* else? Have we saved nothing from the wild waves' cruel play—nothing that we may share,—nothing?"

The young man drew her towards him; and tenderly, reverentially, as he had done when he fancied them whitened by approaching death, kissed, for the second time, Helen's quivering lips. "The storm

did not rob us of everything, love," he said gently. "Do you remember the rift in the clouds when you rushed on deck? Faith in Heaven came down to me then and there, and it has never left me. And love, my darling, was given to us both. Have we not kept that gift?—As I drove home across the moor from the station—intending to take you by surprise, but not so completely as I have done—the sun was shining gloriously on the sea and on the creek which runs up into the Admiral's woods where the message from the ocean was washed on shore. Will you not come with me to the beach?"

Helen made no opposition to his request. In less than an hour she was standing with her lover on the silvery strip of sand under a low, fir-crowned cliff, looking across the Channel. The day, late in autumn, was closing in; but a red gleam shining beneath dark grey clouds struck the boles of the Scotch firs, and glinted on the rippling water. There was no rough wind stirring, but among the pine boughs a low, soft rustle seldom absent from their foliage harmonised with the murmur of the waves creeping one after another over the ribbed sand. The mellow light sparkled and faded on each as it advanced and receded.

Though the air was soft and balmy, the view most

peaceful, Helen shivered. Since she had lived at Sunset, the Signorina and her pupil had never once sought the shore of the neighbouring creek. The sea still, even in its calmer moods, looked cruel to the fragile girl who had so narrowly escaped its fury, and who had seen so many perish in the tempest. Gerald passed his arm tenderly round her.

"Nay, dearest, it is not always terrible," he said soothingly. "God holds the waters in the hollow of His hand. Storm and tempest obey His will and do His bidding, whilst at the same time they fulfil the eternal law of order appointed by the Maker of all creation. Even the wild havoc of winds and waves in which the '*Lord Clyde*' went down, could we read every page of the book of nature, every secret of our mortal destiny, rightly, would be found to have some merciful purpose. Though I shared your peril I still love the sea, even when it roars its loudest; or when it creeps to our feet as now, crested with glorious sunsline. When I was a child I used to come down to this little bay with my mother. Even when she became weak and ill, she loved to recline in her invalid carriage close to the breaking waves, whilst I ran about collecting seaweed and pebbles, or built castles in the sand. Helen, I have never forgotten those happy days. Sunset was home

to me in my mother's lifetime ; it has never been so since. Juliet was too young to be much of a companion ; but my mother !—You were right when you said that his children had never sympathised as they should have done with the Admiral for such an irreparable loss."

"Why do you not call him father ?" said Helen gently "I do not like to hear you call him the Admiral. It sounds cold and unfilial."

"I do not often call him so," said Gerald. "My mother always did, and when I am thinking or speaking of her, the words come of their own accord. Though she loved him very much in her inmost heart, she was very much afraid of my father ; and I first learnt to dread his violent temper, and to shun its outbreaks, when I saw their effect upon her. Ah, Helen, when men like my father give way to their rough humours, they little know what harm they do to themselves and others. Prevarications, concealments, evasions—all are practised to shield weaker natures from those fiery gusts. 'Run away, children, the Admiral is coming,' was a sound of terror in my childhood. It was as though some wild animal had broken loose. Then as I grew older, and stronger, and bolder, whilst our poor young mother slowly faded away, I watched her thin, willowy form

tremble, the hectic flushes come more frequently, and leave beneath them a more fatal wanness, when she heard my father's loud angry tones. It is true he never spoke an unkind word to her, but she felt for us and with us; and she knew that the sunshine was taken out of our young lives by his vexatious arbitrary restrictions. Every fit of unreasonable anger to which he gave way shortened her precious life. Can you wonder, Helen, that in those early days I did not love my father?"

"But he is altered now, quite as much changed as yonder rippling waters," said Helen gently. "Do not let us go back to those unhappy days; though, for once, I am glad you have spoken of them. I feel for you, and for your sister. I know, too, how much Juliet suffered in your absence. She was old enough then to sympathise only too keenly in the misery which drove you from your home. But, Gerald, I feel also very much for your father. Even the wife whom he idolised failed to understand him. It is not an easy thing for one who has had the command over men—saying to one, 'Go,' and he goeth, and to another, 'Come'—to bridle his temper. Yet he has done it. Love for you and Juliet has taught him to gain and keep this mastery over himself. Even if the stormy wind rises, look how soon it blows over;

and when he is himself again he would make any atonement. Let us forget that he was ever different from what we now see him."

"Be it so, dearest," said Gerald tenderly and gratefully. "You are the peace-maker, and I will try for your sake to forget and forgive. I know that I am very far from blameless. But when my mother died and my father quarrelled with Uncle Richard, who had been my friend in a hundred boyish scrapes, I could endure the restraint no longer. Neither did I choose to accept any favour grudgingly and ungraciously bestowed. I ought not to have deserted my poor little sister; but, although his temper was aggravating, I had never seen my father actually unkind to her, any more than he had been to my mother. I thought they might even do better without me, for if Juliet was in disgrace it usually arose from her taking my part. When I was gone I fancied that they might live together more amicably. I cannot altogether regret my abandonment of my home, since but for that we might never have met."

Helen did not contradict this impression. They walked slowly on over the smooth sands, till the sun suddenly, like a ball of fire, sank in the west behind the dark, piled-up clouds.

"Let us go home now," she said; "we shall only just

get there before the bell rings. To-day, of all days, I do not wish to be in disgrace with your father."

Gerald turned homeward immediately. Though he knew how to keep up his manly dignity, the age of boyish rebellion against rules and customs had long gone by; and in all reasonable matters he was quite ready to humour the old officer. The walk through the twilight of the fir-woods with Helen's hand in his, and resting on his arm, while the pine-needles fell slowly down or were pressed beneath their lingering footsteps, was pleasant to both. Though Helen ever after loved the little sunshiny creek when his manly form was near her, she never sought it alone; and perhaps the timid woman's visions of Paradise always were those of a quiet land where "there shall be no more sea."





CHAPTER XXIII.

"God bless you!—'tis a prayer to charm
The human heart from every harm.
God bless you! 'tis a prayer to bless
Man's life with peace and happiness.
And yet how often it is said
By lips whose hearts have never prayed.

"How often, as it were in joke,
God's sacred presence we invoke;
How often, with the parting laugh,
Or sparkling goblet that we quaff,
We lightly utter what should be
Begged, as a boon, on bended knee."

L. H. V

ADMIRAL CHAMPERNOWNE could have found it in his heart to forgive a score of impatient lovers and undutiful daughters, in his delight at hearing that Gerald and Helen were engaged to be married. He felt quite friendly even towards Sir John Desborough in his triumphant satisfaction at having carried his point of securing the Signorina's society; and all necessary preliminaries were promptly and liberally

settled between them. Gerald's father made only one condition, while bestowing half his fortune on the young people now, and settling the remainder on them and Juliet: this was, that they were to reside with him at Sunset.

His son felt a little doubtful respecting the wisdom of this arrangement, and consulted his future bride about it; but Helen was as positive as the Admiral, and would not hear of separate establishments. As long as their kind old friend lived she meant to stay and take care of him. If Gerald did not like Sunset in the Moor he must give her up. She liked the place a thousand times better than The White House; where, even when staying with her sister, she had always experienced an uneasy sensation, and felt like an interloper. It never seemed like home. She would undertake to keep the peace between the two unruly spirits, whose changing moods she had learnt the secret of managing.

Sir John insisted upon giving Helen the liberal portion he had bestowed in his recent testamentary arrangements, which had otherwise to be considerably modified. He gave the same sum to Alan Desborough, his nephew and for some time heir-presumptive, to assist him in his career; and a handsome allowance to his cousin, Mrs. Vernon. The rest of

his ample fortune was to belong to his young wife and would descend to their children. Laura did not wish it to be left at her own disposal.

Though he had forgiven his daughter, who, while she submitted to his will, avowed her unalterable attachment to young Desborough, the Admiral, perhaps wisely, would not at present consent to their marriage or even engagement. Whatever vows they interchanged were clandestine ones ; and they parted without his acknowledging or sanctioning their existence. If the young people were of the same mind some time hence, he did not say, as he had done at first, that he should put a veto on the question, but he would not have it re-opened at present. In a few years Juliet would know her own mind better, after being introduced into society under the auspices of her sister-in-law, and Alan's prospects would be more secure.

Though this decision occasioned some heartburning, the young people bore it with tolerable resignation. Juliet, not quite eighteen, was certainly too young to marry ; and Alan could not delay his departure until her next birthday. They were allowed to have one parting interview in private, on the eve of Gerald and Helen's wedding day ; which was an early one, in order that his friend might stand beside him at the altar.

Lady Desborough long and earnestly withstood her husband's determination and announcement that he meant to give up his appointment, and remain with her and his children in England. His health, she trusted, would soon be re-established, and she feared that, for a man always accustomed to stirring and active pursuits, domestic life, after a time, might become monotonous; but Sir John, having once made up his mind, held firmly to his resolution: and although he became after a time less of an invalid, his physician assured her that his retirement from official duties was not premature.

"Do not fear that I shall ever interfere between you and our little ones, Laura," he said, when the point was finally decided. "But you are too young to stand alone without a protector. I could not bear to part with you again, and I will not separate you from your children. Ah! you do not know—you cannot guess—how I have wearied of the pomp and parade which formerly often came between us. A thousand times I wished I had accompanied you to England, and died with you. Had my loss been really what I imagined, I should have devoted my whole life to the child you had left me. But you have a double claim on Hugh since you brought him back from the grave; and on Violet, from whom you

have never been parted. No other woman could have done what you have done for Hugh, or broken the spell that bound his feeble utterances. It was his mother's love that saved our child. I shall never dispute your will in regard to the boy, or doubt your discretion in future ; but you must let me share your cares and responsibilities."

"Be it so then, John," said Lady Desborough simply. "I am very sorry that your career is cut short, but perhaps it is best that we should remain together. I am often very impulsive and very imprudent. I think I could have taken care of my poor little baby girls in India ; but the child of whom I wilfully deprived you—whom I jealously resolved to keep in my own care alone—was never so dear to me as the others. Violet's blue eyes, like Helen's, always seemed to reproach me tacitly for my abandonment of duty ; and Hugh, as he grows up, will need a father's love, a stronger arm than mine to guide him."

Sir John sighed, but he did not answer her. Perhaps he was thinking that, in the years to come—he scarcely dared to look forward long—his wife would have to dispense with the loving care and tender judgment which, as long as he could exert them, he inwardly vowed should be her shield. Lady Des-

borough, on her part, registered a similar oath in her heart and kept it well. Could the life rescued from shipwreck be devoted to a better purpose than atonement for the sufferings she had caused—for her husband's loss of health, of strength? In that mutual recognition of errors, lay the promise for both of a happier future.

When it was decided that Helen and Gerald were to remain at the Admiral's mansion, Sir John asked leave to continue to be Mr. Champernowne's tenant at The White House. His wife was much attached to the place; and in winter it was likely to suit his own and his little son's health better than Desborough House. This sunny retreat was dear to both husband and wife, and Gerald did not refuse their request, backed by his wife's earnest solicitations. The two sisters would thus be enabled often to be together; and the two families could maintain, for part of the year at all events, their pleasant habits of intercourse.

Admiral Champernowne was charmed with this arrangement, more especially because it removed his last fear of losing Gerald and Helen. He would also be able to enjoy his favourite music. In that respect only he could not help feeling that Helen did not equal her beautiful sister. He was too good a musician to admit of any comparison between them. The

evening amusement, his private concerts, had never been perfect without Mrs. Chichester's assistance—he should never learn to call her by her right name—Lady Desborough. Juliet and the Signorina required to be supported by her richly-cultivated voice.

The organ notes still peal forth from the music gallery, the great bell rings punctually over the valley, and the two households often meet in happy union; while, summer and winter, the morning sunshine streams over the paddocks at The White House, and the rich gold and crimson sunsets light up the rocky castles on the moor.



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